

THE JAMES BOYS WEEKLY.

Containing Stories of Adventure.

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Price 5 Cents.

THE JAMES BOYS' RIVAL BAND; OR,

CARL GREENE'S DOUBLE FIGHT AGAINST OUTLAWS.

BY D. W. STEVENS.



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DEALER J. J. MILLER,
West Wall and Exchange Books
33 East 5th St., New York, N. Y.
CHAPTER I
THE DOUBLE ROBBERY.

"Arthur!"

"Yes, sir."

"Has the train left?"

"Yes, sir."

"What?"

"It has just gone."

"And here is this package left over."

"Did it not go by the last express?"

"No. It was overlooked, and it should have been sent by all means."

"I know it, father," said the young man. "What are we to do about it?"

The banker bowed his head for a moment as if he was puzzled what answer to make, and then said:

"Arthur, could you not take the black colt and ride across the country to Fielding and catch the midnight train?"

Arthur started, and his usually red cheeks grew quite pale, and he glanced from the window to conceal from his father his agitation.

"Yes, sir; I can do it if you will let me."

"Well, here is the package of money," said the banker. "There is in all twenty-five thousand dollars that should have been sent by the last train; but can you carry it?"

"It is quite a sum to trust to a single person."

"Well, Arthur, I would trust ten times the sum with you and my life, too."

"I will deliver it, or I will lose my life in the effort."

"Oh, tut, tut, nonsense. There is no reason for any one to lose their life, my boy. I don't think there is any danger at all. True it is a long, dark, lonesome road, and is through the blackest, darkest forests in all Missouri, but you know it well."

"Yes, father; I have traveled it many a time as dark a night as this will be."

"Now, there is not a particle of danger, and while you run over to the restaurant and get your dinner I will call Job and send him to saddle the black colt."

"All right."

As Arthur seized his hat and ran out of the bank, his father called:

"Job, Job; come here, you rascal."

"Yes, massa," answered the negro janitor, who had been sweeping the hallway, while the father and son were talking of the midnight journey.

"Job, go away at once and saddle the black colt."

"Golly, massa, am Massa Arthur gwine ter Fieldin'?" asked the negro, who had overheard a part of the conversation.

"It is none of your business what we want the colt for; do you go and bring it!"

"Be a awful dark night, massa."

"Go on, you black rascal, and never mind what kind of a ride it will be!"

"Den dem woods am awful dark, an' de James Boys dey hide in em ter shoot a body. Golly, I wouldn't go fur nuffin!"

"No one asks you to go. Get you away, you lazy, impudent camp, and saddle the black colt before I forget the Lincoln Emancipation proclamation was ever issued and give you a good eating!"

The negro grinned, and muttering something about his being a free man, now left his master and went to the barn which stood in the suburbs of the town, some distance away from the bank, and saddled a young thoroughbred black horse.

As he was leading him from the barn a large man with dark whiskers came up to him from behind a shed, and asked:

"Where are you going to ride?"

"I ain't ergoing ter ride."

"Who is?"

"Massa Arthur."

"Who is he?"

"De banker's son, sah!"

The stranger gazed on the young horse with a tion, and asked:

"Is he a thoroughbred?"

"Yes, sah."

"Is he going to ride him far?"

"He am gwine ter Fieldin', sah, an' got ter make et afore midnight."

"Why?"

"Ter catch de midnight train."

"Why does he want to catch the train?"

"I dun know, only I heerd er part ob it, an' I guess dar war er package ob money dat war ter be sent by de last train, an' it warn't done, and dey gwine ter send it ter Fieldin' on de udder road. But it ain't none o' my business, and I guess it ain't none ob yourn."

"Oh, no; of course not. I was just wondering if the black colt could make it?"

"Waal, I reckon him can."

"He has beautiful limbs and a massive chest."

The negro fearing that he would further incur the anger of his master by delaying, hurried away to the bank.

The dark whiskered man watched him, and as he saw the banker's son mount the black horse with the package of money in a pair of saddlebags, he said:

"So, Mr. Arthur Corbett, you are going to brave the dangers of the Black Forest and the swamp of sand, are you? Very well. This will be better, perhaps, than robbing the bank. Instead of going for the money, we will let them bring it to us."

He turned about, and a hundred paces away from the barn brought him to a dark, wooded ravine, wherein sat eight or ten heavily armed men on their horses, waiting for the command to dash upon the bank and rob it.

"Jesse, will we go now?" asked one of the bandits, who was none other than Cole Younger, the lieutenant of the band.

"No."

"Why not?"

"We don't have to rob the bank."

"Don't! How are we to get the money, then?" asked one of the most avaricious of the outlaws, named Wood Hite.

"We can have the money brought to us."

"Explain, Jesse. You are talking in riddles."

"Well, the banker, it seems, was to send a package of money, which is evidently a very large one, to some one by the last train, but he failed to do so. I suppose that among the many business annoyances it was forgotten. He decided at once that the next best thing that could be done was to dispatch his son, Arthur, across the neck of the Black Forest and swamp of sand in time to catch the midnight train at that place, and send him on with the money."

"Jesse, that is better than robbing the bank," said one of the bandits.

"Certainly it is."

"Let us head him off."

"That we will."

The bandit, who was none other than the great chief, Jesse James, went to where one of the band sat on a blooded bay steed with a white nose holding another horse.

Jesse mounted his own horse, which was as famous as himself. He was named Siroc, thorough Arabian, and was large with long, clean limbs, and such a picture of beauty that a lover of horseflesh might have gone mad with delight at sight of him.

Jesse James placed one foot in the stirrup, and mounting led the band down the ravine, and in a roundabout way to the Black Forest which came almost up to the village.

In the meanwhile we must return to Arthur Corbett who is about to make his perilous and very disagreeable ride.

His father had him come in the bank and get the package of money, which was twenty-five thousand dollars, and put it in his saddle pockets. As he did so the father said:

"Now, Arthur, you must not get off your horse, nor let go your saddle pockets until you have reached the station of Fielding. Then you may get off, leave the horse, board the train and take the money to Applegate & Company of St. Louis."

"I will."

"And I will telegraph to Fred Still at Fielding to look after the horse."

"All right."

"Are you ready now?"

"Yes."

"Well, go on."

The young man went to the front door, and placing the saddle pockets, or saddlebags, on his horse, he mounted the animal and rode away.

He took an eastern course through the great forest, which was called the Black Forest, and which, during the war, was made a general rendezvous for the guerrillas under Quantrell and Bill Anderson, Edwards, Shelby and other famous horse thieves of that day.

The youth continued his lonesome ride.

The black colt seemed to never tire.

Its long, clean limbs and wonderful muscles worked like some powerful piece of machinery, and the regular play of feet and legs on the road made it seem some animated engine.

The sun had set, and the moon and stars were out in all their glory, when Arthur, suddenly drawing rein, said:

"I know you had better rest a moment."

As he sat on his horse in the road he suddenly turned his eyes westward, and saw a great, dark cloud overspreading that part of the sky.

"What, is it really going to rain?" the young man asked himself. "Is it possible that it is going to rain, and I had absolutely not known it?"

He started his horse on again, and cast an occasional glance at the west, from whence there came occasional rumbles of thunder and flashes of lightning.

The dark clouds spread until the moon and stars were shut out, and then the storm came on.

The wind howled about him and the rain came down in terrible torrents.

Suddenly a voice, seeming to come from the darkness, directly before him, cried:

"Halt!"

He drew rein.

"Who is that?" he asked himself.

"Stand and deliver!"

"Never!"

"Take that, then!"

Bang!

A bullet whistled past his face, so close to him as to graze his cheek.

He drew his own revolver in a moment and sent the shot whistling back at the man.

"Be careful there, Bill! Who is it?"

"I don't know, but I will have him."

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The youth felt his horse give a great spasmodic leap, as if he had been struck with a whip, and becoming unmanageable, he went flying down the road as fast as he could go.

The banker's son tried to control him, but he ran headlong through the woods, having left the road, and was evidently running unconscious of which course he was taking.

He plunged through the thickets, briars and brambles and at last tumbled headlong over a considerable precipice.

Arthur was conscious of falling. His head struck something, and he was stunned and confused, but was never wholly unconscious. He clung to the horn of the saddle, and as soon as he could, extricated himself from the horse which lay partially on one of his legs.

Quite exhausted by this effort he lay for a moment by the side of the horse, trying to gather up his strength. Suddenly he heard the sound of voices above him.

Some one said:

"He went over here!"

"Look out you don't go over, Bill Dalton."

"This is the Dalton gang," Arthur thought.

He seized the saddle pockets containing the money, and took them off the saddle. Then he put out his hand and felt the horse. It was still and he knew it must be dead.

"Noble fellow, you have done your part well," the youth thought. "Now I must go alone."

He crept away from the horse on his hands and knees, taking care not to make any noise, for the outlaws could be heard on the bluff above him.

A flash of lightning suddenly illuminated the scene far and near, and he saw the form of men standing on the bluff above. He was certain there were a dozen of them at least.

He placed his hand on a stone, and crept around it.

He then counted the steps from there along the cliff, keeping under the rocks.

Just three hundred and seventeen steps from the place where there were great cracks or crevices in the rocks, and bent over and thrust the saddle pockets into it.

In a moment he covered all up with leaves and crammed leaves into the hole in which he had placed the saddle pockets.

"Come on—come on!" said a voice behind him. "I tell you he is not near that boss. The animal got his neck broken falling over the bank."

"Yes."

"Well, come on."

"He's close to it, maybe."

"No, he went up this way."

At this moment a vivid flash of lightning suddenly illuminated the scene, and the youth saw coming toward him Bill Dalton and his terrible band, which had been the rival of the James Boys in Missouri.

"There he is."

"Where, Bill?"

"Right ahead."

"It is too dark now to see."

Bang!

A bullet whizzed past Dalton's face.

"On—on, all of you!" roared the bandit chief. "Don't let him have a chance to shoot again!"

With wild yells the bandits rushed on him.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bullets rained in the air. The youth fired at the flash of their weapons and wounded one of the band, but he was soon knocked down and tied hand and foot.

"Now what has he got?" asked Bill Dalton. "Search him, boys, and see what he has."

They searched the youth and found only about three hundred and fifty dollars about his person.

"That was nothing for you to risk your life for and make such a fuss over," said Dalton. "I thought you carried a whole bank in your pockets."

He made no answer.

"What is your name?" asked Dalton.

"Brown," Arthur answered.

"Brown! Which one of the Browns are you?"

"John."

"Well, John Brown, you may think you got off lucky in not getting a bullet put into your head."

"Well, I think I fared bad enough. You killed my horse and took all my money."

"Yes, that is so. But had you not showed fight we would never have hurt your horse."

"I would have lost my money."

"You lost it anyway."

Arthur was silent.

One of the bandits said:

"Well, what are you going to do with him, Bill?"

"I don't know that we have any more use for him, so let him go."

"Hadn't we better string him up to a limb?"

"No."

"Why?"

"We don't want anything of that kind on our trails. People don't care so much for a few dollars as they do for a life. Let him go; and come on."

The bandits made their way back to the point where they could scale the bluff, and, mounting their horses, rode away.

Arthur remained where they had left him, more dead than alive, for a few moments, and then rising, went back to where he had concealed the money.

"Perhaps I had better take it and go on," he thought.

He had put his hand in the hole where the money was concealed, with the intention of taking it out, when a new thought entered his mind and he said:

"No, no, that won't do! I could not get it there in time, anyway, and I might meet those fellows before I got out of the forest. I will leave it where it is, return home and get a guard to come with me and take it out."

He crept slowly up the cliff to the place where his dead horse lay, and went slowly along the road, feeling his way along in the darkness, and hoping to strike the main thoroughfare, so that he could get back home.

He ran against a bush as he was groping his way along, and caused a slight rustling.

"Who is there?" asked a voice.

Arthur was about to retreat, when he heard a footstep behind him.

"I am surrounded," he thought.

A whistle sounded on the night air, and he heard the signal answered in two or three different places.

"Throw on the light!" said the man, who was called Jesse James.

In a moment Arthur heard the click of slides all around him, and then there came gleams of light from half a dozen different directions, all falling upon him.

"There he is!" cried Jim Cummins.

"Where?"

"In that clump of hazels."

"Oh, yes, we see him now! Shall we make an end of him, Jesse?"

"No, not unless he is ugly. Come out of there, sir, or I will drop you with a bullet!"

Arthur was helpless to defend himself, and obeyed, coming to the bandit king.

"By the way, lads, this is the very man we are after," said the robber king. "Come, come, sir, and give up all the money and valuables you have about you!"

"I have been robbed!" said he.

"Oh, that is too thin! Come, let me have your money!"

He thrust his fingers in the vest-pocket of the young man, and drew therefrom two five dollar bills, which the other bandits had overlooked.

"I told you I had been robbed before I met you, and I suppose they overlooked the two bills which you found in my vest-pocket. They took everything else."

Jesse started back, and, glancing at his men, said:

"Boys, this is a pretty howdy do! What are we to do in this case?"

"Who did it, Jess?" asked Jim Cummins.

"No doubt it was that Bill Dalton and his gang. They have started out to be our rivals, it seems. Never mind; we will make it hot for them, if they attempt anything of the kind."

"Well, let us see if this man has told the truth," put in Cole Younger.

"How are we to know?"

"Let us go down under the bluff and see if the horse is lying there where he says it is."

"All right; come on. Let us go and look after it."

The James Boys, with their prisoner in their midst, went down to the bank of the precipice, and by throwing the light of their lanterns down the steep cliff, saw the black colt lying where he had fallen.

"Jim, go down and see if the beast is dead."

Jim clambered down and in a few moments returned and reported that he was dead.

"It is a pity," said Jesse James. "It is really a pity that such an excellent animal as that should be killed. It was nothing but a colt, but it had the making of a splendid horse in him."

"I am sure of that," said some of the others, and then the bandits turned away, taking Arthur with them.

"I have been twice robbed to-night," the youth thought, "and now I wonder what they are going to do with me?"

CHAPTER II.

CARL GREENE.

Mr. George Corbett awaited a long time to hear from his son, and not doing so, telegraphed to the firm of Applegate & Co., of St. Louis, to know if they had seen him, but he had not been there.

Days passed on, and the parents of Arthur were almost frantic.

Then some one came in from the forest and reported that they had seen the black colt lying at the foot of the cliff, dead, and that it had a pistol shot in its breast.

There was no doubt but that the James Boys or their rivals had attacked the youth, and no doubt had him prisoner somewhere in the great forest.

The father told his wife that he was going to set out next day to Chicago.

"Why?"

"I want to engage a detective to look this matter up," said the anxious father.

Next train bore Mr. Corbett from the town to Chicago.

The following morning he reached the office of a famous detective, and entering it, asked:

"Is Mr. Carl Greene in?"

"I think he will be in soon," said a young man, who sat at a desk writing.

"I want to see him very badly."

"Will you have a seat in the waiting-room and wait until he comes?"

He was shown into a waiting-room where lay the morning paper.

At last, when his patience was almost completely exhausted, he heard a footstep in the hall and some one entered the outer office.

He looked up and saw that it was a young man, and he thought:

"That can't be Mr. Greene."

The man was smooth shaved, and looked more like a boy just reaching manhood than a mature man.

At last he came into the room where the banker sat and asked:

"Did you wish to see me?"

"No, sir; I wanted to see Mr. Greene."

"Greene—I am Mr. Greene."

"Carl Greene?"

"Yes, sir."

"The detective?"

"The same."

"I want to engage you at once to come to the rescue of my son."

"What is the matter with your son?" asked the detective.

"Perhaps I had better tell you all about it?"

"I expect you had."

The banker then told him how he had sent his son with a large sum of money across the country to catch the train at Fielding, and that the money had never been sent, and the horse of his son had been found dead in the woods at the foot of the cliff.

When he had finished the detective said:

"You have some desperate outlaws out there in Missouri."

"Yes, the James Boys."

"Were they in the neighborhood of the Black Forest on the night that your son attempted to cross it?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think about it?"

"I think it was either their work or the work of a rival band under Bill Dalton, that has started up in Missouri and Kansas."

"Perhaps."

The detective bowed his head for a moment in deep thought.

At last he said:

"Now, the chances are, Mr. Corbett, that your son is a prisoner."

"Why should they make him a prisoner?"

"Weil, that puzzles me, unless it was to get a ransom for him. I think that perhaps they might have done it with that intention, yet it has been so long since he was made prisoner that a ransom should have been demanded long ago."

"Yes."

"Then why did they make him a prisoner?"

"I don't know."

"If the James Boys did it they have some object, let me assure you."

"I know that."

"It is to make him do something or reveal some secret to them, or to hold him to keep him from telling something."

The father said:

"I give it all up. I have thought and thought and tried in a thousand different ways to get at the real truth of the whole thing, but I can't do it, sir. I want to get you to do it for me. Will you?"

"Yes."

"Then set your price. I have some money left and all I will give for my son. He was my only child."

The father's despair was fully indicated in speaking of his son in the past tense as if he already believed him dead.

There never lived a more tender-hearted man than Carl Greene. The great detective has frequently been induced to risk his life for people who had enlisted his sympathy, and whom he knew would never be able to repay him for what he did.

He quickly made terms quite agreeable to the banker, and the latter asked:

"Now, Mr. Greene, when will you set out on your mission?"

"At once."

Then the detective bade him adieu, and said:

"When I want you I will call at your house. Be not surprised if you see me at any hour, or if you do not see me at all."

"You are a wonderful man."

"Good-morning, sir!"

"Good-morning!"

The banker went out, and the detective closing the door

down at a desk, and opening a book began to write down some minutes that he wished to record.

He wrote rapidly for some time, then called his chief clerk into the office and whispered a few words to him, and rising, left by a secret door.

An hour later a train leaving Chicago bore an elderly gentleman, who wore a pair of goggle-eyed spectacles, and had the air of a minister or merchant.

He sat alone in a corner of the car, and said little to any one.

The train ran into East St. Louis and went across the bridge, and passed through that long, famous tunnel which so nearly chokes everybody to death who ventures to pass through it.

Then all of a sudden, all filled with dust and smoke, it bursts through the tunnel, and amid a thunder of puffing sounds, and the loud clang of bells, the train ran into the Union Depot.

It is one of the greatest depots in America.

Ever so many railroad systems rush into this one depot.

There are trains going and coming all the time, and all is uproar and hubbub, and many an inexperienced traveler has been utterly confused.

The elderly gentleman, who was Carl Greene, got off, and with his grip in his hand, went slowly up to the ticket office window.

He asked for a ticket to Warrenton.

In a few moments the detective left on the train for Warrenton.

CHAPTER III.

JESSE AND DALTON.

We must take leave of Carl Greene for the present, as he flies on to the place of his work, and go back to the James Boys and their prisoner, Arthur Corbett.

The reader will remember that we left Arthur in their hands just after they had discovered that he had been robbed by the rival band of outlaws and his horse killed.

It was still very dark, but the rain had almost ceased falling.

"Jesse," whispered Jim Cummins, who kept pretty close to the side of his chief.

"What, Jim?"

"What are you going to do with him?"

"I don't know."

"H hadn't we better kill him?"

"Why?"

"Dead men tell no tales," said Jim.

"Yes, but in this case he can tell nothing that will injure us. I think that we had as well let him go."

"Let him go?"

"Yes. What do we want with him here? He can be of no possible advantage to us."

"No; yet he will tell of this night's work."

"What need we care for that? We will be far away before any detectives or sheriffs' posses can get after us. I think Carl Greene is in Chicago, and Timberlake in Kansas City, so there will be no immediate raid made on us here."

He sounded the signal for the band to stop, and when they had halted, gathered Frank James, Jim Cummins and Cole Younger, and one or two others about him, as a sort of advisory committee.

"Now, boys, it is evident that the Dalton gang, our rivals, took the big swag, the twenty-five thousand dollars," said Jesse.

"Of course."

"Now, how are we to get it?"

"Well, that is a question I don't see through," said the bandit lieutenant.

Jesse struck his heel into the ground and said:

"I believe it will be a good plan to see this Bill Dalton, and if he don't divide up with us we will make war on his band, and never let up until we have exterminated the whole gang of them."

"Who will see him, Jesse?" Jim asked.

"I will!"

"They say this Bill Dalton is a bad one, and that he will fight."

"I don't care," Jesse answered, with a laugh. "I think that we will keep the youngster prisoner until we have had this interview with Bill Dalton, and ascertained how much truth there is in his story."

"That will do. Where shall we take him?"

"Let us go at once to our hiding place and get out of this abominable rain," said Jim Cummins, who was a good hand to look after his own personal comfort.

"All right, we will go."

"And the prisoner, Jesse?"

"Take him along, Wood Hite. Be sure he don't escape, too."

"He will not do that."

"We'd rip him up the back with bullets if he undertook any-

thing of that kind," said another of the outlaws named Jim Younger.

The bandits began a long march of two hours, and when they reached their hiding place or stronghold, it proved to only be a tent stretched in a dense jungle of trees, bushes and hazels.

"Here you will have to stay for a while," said Jesse James to the prisoner.

"Why?" he asked. "You have taken all my money, and now why do you want me?"

"Wait, and we will see about it in time."

The young man was silent.

Next day the bandit king, mounted on his coal-black steed, Siroc, went galloping over the country in various directions.

Searching for the Daltons was like hunting for a needle in a haystack.

He knew not where to search for them, and all efforts to find them for a while, were entirely unavailing.

At last, as he sat on the back of his noble steed, he caught a glimpse of a man on a sorrel horse among the trees.

In a moment Jesse James had his cocked revolver in his hand, and was waiting to shoot the man if he should prove to be hostile.

The man discovered him, and a moment later the gleam of a pistol barrel shone in the morning light.

Crack!

Whiz! went a bullet through the air, passing within a few inches of the head of the bandit king.

"I wonder if that is Dalton," Jesse coolly said.

He touched Siroc's rein, and the steed bounded to one side among the bushes, just as another shot rang out, and a second ball came so close as to touch the crown of his hat.

"I think that it is time I was taking a hand in this myself," said the bandit king.

He watched his chance and fired.

But Bill Dalton, for it was indeed that daring outlaw, had seen what the bandit king was about and had exposed his hat rather than his head to the shot.

The ball went through his hat and passed into the tree.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The rapid shots echoed and re-echoed through the forest, and the men wheeled their horses about and dodged and fought each other with all their might, but in vain. Neither could get an advantage over the other.

All the while they had kept so concealed that they could not recognize each other.

Jesse James did not wish to shoot the man, if he was Bill Dalton, if he could help it, so at last he called out:

"A truce to you, whoever you are! Let us get acquainted."

The bandits ceased firing and Jesse's antagonist asked:

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes."

"Honest?"

"I am honest."

"Well, let me see your face."

"Will you shoot?"

"No."

"What assurance have I that you will not?"

"This."

Jesse's antagonist thrust his revolvers into his belt and held up his hands.

"Well, what do you think of that?"

"It is all right," said Jesse James. "And now so long as you keep your hands up I will look at you, but bear in mind that I have my own hand on a reliable revolver, and if you attempt to shirk in the least, or play me any tricks, I will send a ball through your head."

"Ha! ha! ha! How are you going to send a bullet through my head when you can't see my head?"

"I will manage to guess the direction your head lies," said the bandit king.

He then raised his head from behind the tree and looked out.

"Say, are you not Jesse James?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were."

"You are correct in your surmises, and now I want to know if you are not Bill Dalton?"

There was a moment of silence.

"Come, speak up," said Jesse James. "The sooner we know each other the better."

"Then, I am."

"Well, I can see no reason why we should be shooting at each other."

"We are rivals."

"We are both engaged in the same kind of business, and though

"You may not be much love between us, yet we had just as well let the sheriff's and detectives have the pleasure of shooting us, as to do it ourselves."

"Now you talk sense," said Dalton.

"Come out."

"You come out!"

"No, you come out first: I showed my head first."

"Well, Jesse James, I will trust you once. They say that black you are painted you have an odd way of keeping your promises."

"Yes, no man can say I ever broke a promise whether it was for revenge or reward."

The bandit called Dalton rode out from the thicket into full view of Jesse James.

"The bandit king saw at a glance that he had not a single weapon in his hand and rode out to meet him."

"They met and clasped hands, and Jesse said:

"Now that we know ourselves let us have a peaceful talk."

"I am willing."

"Have you seen any of those disagreeable fellows called detectives or sheriffs in the neighborhood?"

"No. Have you?"

"Not one."

"Then let us say we are safe."

"No, it is never best to think we are safe. We will put that

down as one chance in favor of our safety."

"Very well, just as you wish it."

"Let us dismount."

"I am willing."

Both sprang from their horses, and while their tired animals nibbled the grass they sat down each at the root of a tree and began a pleasant conversation.

"So you are Bill Dalton?" said Jesse James.

"Yes, and you are Jesse James!"

"I am."

"I suspected it all along, and while we were popping at each other, could not but hope all the time that we would both miss."

"I did not shoot exactly to kill."

"I am glad that the affair has terminated so pleasantly."

"Not more glad than I; and now, Bill——"

"Well?"

"Do you know I started out to find you?"

"To find me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I wanted to see you on a matter of business."

Bill Dalton opened wide his eyes in astonishment, and asked:

"Why, what can you wish to see me about?"

"Well, Bill, I wanted to talk with you about a matter which concerns me, and perhaps you."

"Go ahead, Jesse James!"

"Did you do a stroke of business last night?"

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"During the storm."

"Why, let me think. Where were we? We must have been in the forest last night."

"I have no doubt that you were. What I wanted to know was you did any work in the forest last night during the storm. It is very important that I have the truth about the matter."

"Why, yes."

"What was it?"

"We robbed a young fellow. I think he was young, but it was dark we could hardly see."

"Whom did you rob?"

"Oh, we never asked his name."

"Was the man mounted or on foot?"

"He was on horseback, and let me assure you that he fought like a tiger."

"Did you kill his horse?"

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"The horse plunged over a precipice and fell with such force as to break his neck, I suppose. Then the rider crawled away, but I found him."

"Now have you any objection to telling me how much money you took from him?"

"No."

"How much was it?"

"It was not over three hundred dollars."

"Not over three hundred?"

"No; it was not four, I know. I don't remember the exact amount."

The bandit king looked disappointed.

He had hoped that Bill would tell the truth, but he was now quite certain that he was lying.

Jesse James was a bold-spoken person, and he said:

"Bill!"

"What?"

"We ought to be honest and truthful with each other."

"Yes, I think so."

"Why don't you tell me the truth?"

"I am telling the truth as nearly as I can," said Bill.

"Tell me truly, did you not take a package of money from the saddle-bags?"

"Saddle-bags!" cried Bill, opening his eyes wide in astonishment.

His surprise was so plain and apparent that it was evident that he was not shamming.

"Yes; did you not find the saddle-bags he carried behind him on his saddle?"

"No; there were no saddle-bags."

"There were."

"There was not."

"Then what became of them?"

"How can I tell? I never saw them."

"You did not?"

"No, nor heard of them."

The bandit king bowed his head in his hands, and after a moment's thought, said to himself:

"I am of the opinion that we have both been played for suckers, Bill."

"Why?"

"That young fellow left the bank that night with a package of money, which I have been informed did not amount to less than twenty-five thousand dollars."

"What! Such a sum as that?"

"Yes."

"What became of it?"

"Well, that is the question that I have not yet been able to decide. I think, however, that the money was taken by you, or else he conceded it before you got to him."

"Well, we did not get it."

"How long after you shot the horse before you got to him?"

"It must have been an hour."

"Were you near him when the horse fell over the cliff?"

"No."

"Was he by the horse when you came to him?"

"No."

"How far from it did you find him?"

"I think it was three or four hundred yards."

"Then if what you say is true, the money was concealed by him."

"I suppose it was."

"Well, I have him and will make him tell us where it is, or I will roast him alive," said the bandit king.

"I tell you what it is, Jesse, if you get that twenty-five thousand you must whack up."

"What!"

"You must divide."

"Well, we will see about that. Bill, when we have found the money."

"Now, look here, Jesse, you must make a fair deal. Had you known that we got the money you would have demanded half of us."

"Yes, because I had a right to expect half of you."

"Why?"

"It was our case. We started out to rob the bank. It was our legitimate plunder, and when we saw this young hotblood start away from the town with a large sum about him, we thought it better to lay in wait and rob him. He was our legitimate prey. Had you done it you would have been stealing from us."

"I don't see that there is much fairness in the way you treat Jesse James. If you get the money it is all yours, and if we get it it is half yours."

"That is right."

"I see nothing right about it," said Bill, rising and mounting his horse.

"Well, because you fail to see anything in it, is because you are too stubborn, and don't want to."

"I don't think it is necessary for us to quarrel," put in Bill.

"We will not," the bandit king answered, as he leaped on his horse. "But I assure you that if you find the package of money, which is by right my own, I will have my half of it."

"We will see to that!" cried the bandit.

"Take care, Dalton, that you don't make me your enemy. I may be far more useful to you as your friend than as your enemy."

The two men separated, and Jesse James muttered:

"When next we meet it may be at dagger's point!"

CHAPTER IV.

CARL GREENE BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

Jesse James went back to where his band were.

He had gained one point, and only one, by his interview with Bill Dalton, which came very nearly having as stormy an ending as it had beginning.

When he reached his tent he called for Jim Cummins.

"I am here, Jesse. What do you want?" Jim Cummins asked, presenting himself to the tent of the chief.

"How is the prisoner?"

"A little melancholy, but otherwise well."

"He has not been given his liberty?"

"No. You said that he was not to be given his liberty until you returned, in order that you might decide whether he was to have it or not."

"Well, no; I don't intend he shall have his liberty yet. Send him to me."

In a few moments the pale young man, under a guard of two bandits, great, grim, dark fellows, came to the bandit king's presence and stood meekly before Jesse.

"Well, sir, how are you?" Jesse asked.

"As well as a captive in ignorance of his fate can be," said the youth.

"I am glad that you are so well. Sit down there on that saddle. I want to talk with you."

"What do you wish to talk about?" Arthur asked, seating himself on the saddle.

"I want to talk about yourself."

"What about myself?"

"Do you want your liberty?"

"Would a bird?"

"Well, now, I don't intend to exact any large ransom from your father for you. Just tell me where you placed that package of twenty-five thousand dollars and you can have your liberty."

"Did I not tell you I was robbed?"

"Yes."

"Don't you believe me?"

"Yes."

"Then how can you think that I did not lose the twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Because that was not taken from you."

"How do you know?"

"I have seen the man who robbed you."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"Bill Dalton and his gang."

"Well, surely he took the money from me."

"He took money from you, but it was not over three or four hundred dollars at the most."

"I want to know how you know anything about it."

"Bill Dalton told me all about it."

"Well, did he say he did not get all the money I had?"

"No."

"Then why do you think I have any more?"

"Simply because I know you started from the bank with a package of twenty-five thousand dollars to take over to Fielding and send on the train."

"How do you know that?"

"I know that you started with it."

The young man bowed his head a moment in silence, and then asked:

"How do you know that when you never saw me and I never saw you until after I had been robbed?"

"Arthur Corbett, it is useless for you to interrogate me. I know that you started with a package of money to take to Fielding where you were to board the train."

"We were close on your track and had intended to overhaul you and make you our prisoner. But the storm came on and delayed us some, and you fell into Dalton's hands. He got no money save out of your side-pockets, and now I want to know where you concealed the other money, the twenty-five thousand?"

Arthur all along had been too truthful to tell a direct falsehood.

Now that he was completely cornered he looked the bandit king in the face and said:

"I will not tell."

"You won't?"

"No."

"And yet you know?"

"I did not say that I did."

"But you had as well say so."

"I will tell you nothing about it."

"Very well, then, you shall be made do it. We have a way of opening people's mouths. We can make them say a thing that they want to keep secret."

Arthur answered:

"Burn me at the stake and yet I won't answer you!"

"We shall see."

The bandit then called the two guards and said:

"Take him away to the dark cave, and let him stay there on bread and water until I send for him."

"Come on," said the guard, and one seized his left and one his right arm and led him away.

Almost a week passed and Jesse James and his men had been searching the woods and rocks in the neighborhood of the cliff where the horse had fallen, in vain for some sign of the package of money.

They had met Bill Dalton's gang, their rivals, on one or two occasions, and no particular love existed between them.

If the money was found there would be no doubt about a fight between the rival bands.

Jesse James had had an inkling of a movement on foot to get some detectives or his old enemy, Timberlake, on their trail, and had sent two of his men away to St. Louis to act as spies and ascertain what truth there was in the report.

They had been gone three days when they came back.

"Well, what success did you have?" Jesse James asked.

"He is coming!"

"Who?"

"The detective."

"What detective?"

"The detective of all detectives that we would rather not see, Carl Greene."

"Then if that is the case we will have something to look out for."

"Jesse, why do you think he comes at this particular time?" asked Jim Cummins.

"Because he has been sent for."

"By whom?"

"By the father of our prisoner, the rich banker."

"Then we are the meat he is after?"

"Yes, we are the objects of his desires, and there can be no doubt of it."

At that very time an old man driving a one-horse gig or road cart was riding slowly along the road through the woods. He was not more than eight miles from the place where the banker's son had been attacked, which was not over five or six miles from the spot where the bandits were encamped.

The aged traveler, or at least he seemed aged, was looking steadfastly on a large, stone house that stood across the field and about three-fourths of a mile away.

The sun was sinking in the west and the night would soon come on.

The traveler fixed his eye on the old stone house and started his horse toward it as if it was his only hope.

It took him but a short time to reach the old stone house, and he then drew rein and called to the man who was standing by the gate.

"Hulloa!"

The dog barked, and the man, whose pantaloons were stuffed into a pair of coarse cowhide boots, came a step forward, and, kicking the dog, said:

"Git out, Taylor!"

"Hilloa!"

"Hello, yerself, ef yer want ter!" growled the gruff voice. "Wot yer want, anyway?"

"Waut ter git ter stay all night."

"Who air yer?"

"I am Ebernezer Vorhies, an' I am travelin'."

"Yas, so I see. Whar be yer goin'?"

"Goin' ter Fieldin', but I hev thort I can't make et through that air forest ter-night."

"Reckin ye'd find et mighty tough," said the farmer.

"I don't want ter try et."

"Jake, this 'ere old feller wants ter stay all night."

"We don't keep hotel, Ben."

"But et's gittin' mighty late, an' I hev er long way ter go," said the old man.

"Waal, Ben?"

"Waal, Jake?"

"Let him stay."

Ben went with the old man and aided him in stabling his horse and feeding him, and then the old man went to the house.

"I never saw a place more resemble a fort," the traveler thought on entering it.

The windows were small and narrow, and almost, if not quite, as high as a man's breast.

He found two women, both past middle age and seeming to be

domestics, about the house. His supper was prepared for him, and aided by a single tallow dip candle to light him, he sat down to the supper-table.

Scarcely had he finished his supper when he heard the clatter of hoofs, and two horsemen rode up and demanded admittance to the old castle-like house.

There was something familiar in the voice of one of the horsemen, whom the old man—who was Carl Greene in disguise—recognized as the bandit king himself.

They had a little discussion with the proprietors and entered the house.

Carl Greene left the kitchen, and seeing a winding stair extending up from the back of the house, followed it, and reached the floor above, where he paused to listen.

"Give us our supper," said the bandit king, in a terrible voice, which indicated that he was angry.

"All right, all right," said the man called Jake; "yer shall have et."

"And we intend staying until late if not all night."

"Stay ez long ez yer please, gentlemen," said the humiliated Jake.

"We have money to pay for which we order."

"Yes, yes, I reckon yer hev."

"We want it quick, too. Have you anything to drink?"

"Thar's some whisky."

"Bring it out," said the bandit king.

The two bandits stalked into the kitchen and seated themselves at the very table where the detective had been a short time before.

"Jim!" said Jesse.

"What, Jess?"

"We are not the first here."

"Why?"

"Look at that plate. Don't you see some one has been here before us?"

"Jess, it looks that way."

"Let us call in this old fellow and ask him about it."

"All right."

"Hey, Jake! Say, Jake!"

Jake, who had a mortal dread of the two men who had intruded themselves on him, entered at this moment and asked:

"Wot yer want, gentlemen? I'll do anything yer want done. Wot yer want?"

"Who else have you in the house?"

"No un but er pore old feller wot was travelin' an' wanted ter stay all night."

"Then go and bring us something."

No sooner were the James Boys alone than the bandit king said:

"I am at a loss, Jim, to know whether that rival band is playing us false or not."

"Why?"

"The Dalton crowd can't be relied on. They may have the twenty-five thousand dollars and not let us know anything about it."

"But do you think they took it from the boy?"

"No."

"I don't think they did."

"He says not, and I tell you that Arthur Corbett cannot be made to tell a lie."

"What are you going to do with Arthur, Jess?"

"We will keep him until he tells us where he concealed the money."

"I don't believe he will ever tell you or any one else."

"We will make him."

"How?"

"By torture."

Jim laughed and answered:

"He boasts that you may burn him at the stake and still he won't tell," said the bandit.

The owner of the stone house entered at this point, and the conversation changed to other topics.

Carl Greene at last found himself forced to leave the landing and went to the attic.

He was listening to the sound of Jim and Jesse conversing in the room below, when he heard a low "whist!" in the yard.

He looked down and saw three or four dark forms stealing forward toward the great stone building as if it was their intention to rob the house.

They paused and he discovered that they had black masks over their faces.

"That is odd!" said the detective. "Can it be that this is a part of the James Boys?"

He ceased even to think, but placing his ear to the window, listened with all his powers of hearing.

A man, who seemed to be a sort of leader of the band, was saying:

"Now, boys, I want to caution you all to let no one escape,"

said the masked leader. "We want to make a clean sweep this time. I am satisfied these fellows who live here have found the package of money, or that Arthur Corbett, whom we had in our power is here a prisoner. Let us tear down the house and see."

"Bill!" another voice faintly whispered.

"What, Dock?"

"Do you think those fellows are in cahoots with the James Boys?"

"Yes, I wouldn't be surprised if you find some of 'em here."

"What if we do?"

"Serve 'em just as you do the others, no worse and no better."

Then the bandit leader gave orders for his men to get ladders and scale the walls to the windows above.

"This places me in a disagreeable position," said Carl Greene.

"I am between two fires."

CHAPTER V.

THE NIGHT OF PERIL.

Some of the men went and brought long ladders.

Carl Greene soon saw that they were not unnoticed.

He heard the sound of whispering below, and just as the ladders were set up, and the men began to climb, there rang out on the air a keen whistle, and in five seconds, with wild yells, a dozen dark forms came leaping from the garden.

"Down with the ladders!"

Bang!

Bang!

The night air was ablaze with pistol shots and the smoke rolled up about the building.

The ladders were overturned, and for a few moments the rival bands of outlaws were mingled with each other in a terrible conflict.

The voice of Jesse James could be heard from the window calling to the men below to fight and drive them back.

"Come down, Jesse James, and fight like a man!" roared the giant of the rival band.

"Where are you?" asked the bandit king.

"Here!"

Bang!

Bang!

Two shots rang out simultaneously, and the ball from the pistol of Jesse James caused Bill Dalton to stagger, while Bill's bullet sent the splinters from the side of the window flying in the face of the bandit king.

"Jesse, that is cowardly of you."

"It is cowardly of you to profess to be friendly with us and at the same time to be slipping around to attack us," said the bandit king.

"Take that!"

Bang!

"I would rather not, but you can have this!"

Crack!

Bill Dalton staggered backward, and had not one of his men caught him in his arms he would have fallen.

The ball had come so close to his head as to daze and stun him.

In a moment he was himself again, however, and said:

"Down with the house, boys, set it on fire!"

The order was useless.

Already the James Boys had forced the principal part of his band away from the yard, and were driving the others off.

The men came to a stand.

"We will never stir a step from here until we have dislodged 'em!" roared Bill Dalton. "Jesse James will find out that we ain't no choppin' blocks."

The conflict was resumed at a long distance.

Carl Greene was exposed to the bullets of the banditti, and the James Boys were below him so he could not leave the house.

The firing was slow.

The Daltons outnumbered the James Boys, and surrounding the house with guns, began to shoot from behind the trees and fence corners.

Suddenly Bill Dalton cried:

"Can't some o' you fire the house?"

"I can, Bill!" said one of the band.

"Then creep up and do it."

"No, I don't have to do that."

"How are you goin' to do it, then?"

"Wait and you'll see."

He drew the ramrod from his gun and wound it all about with tow. Then he took a small vial of turpentine and thoroughly saturated it.

Loading his gun with a ball and powder, he pushed the ram-

rod in on top of it, and then setting fire to the end sticking beyond the barrel, fired at the house.

With a whiz and a whish the burning mass went flying through the air, and alighted on the top of the house.

The burning ramrod flying through the air was like a meteor. It whizzed and hummed, and with many a whirl and swish finally struck in the exact spot for which it was aimed.

"That will do. Stop, boys, no cheerin'!" cautioned Bill Dalton, as the men began to cheer.

"There ain't no need to tell them what we have been doin'."

The men became silent, and continued to fire, while they watched the blaze on the top of the roof growing brighter and brighter every moment.

The James Boys had little fears of the Daltons.

They were eager to rush upon and annihilate them, but Jesse James, who did not care to lose any men, said:

"Keep cool, and remain where you are."

"We can lick 'em, Jesse," said Jim Cummins.

"I know we can. We will not run any chances when there is no need to do so."

"They had an object in making this attack," said Jim Cummins.

"What was it?" asked Cole Younger.

"They think that we have Arthur Corbett concealed here."

"Do they? Well, Jesse, this places us in a bad shape, just at the time, too, that we want to make the attack on the old Chicago & Alton," put in Wood Hite.

"So they intended robbing a train," the detective thought. "I am glad to know that."

"We will beat them off and do it yet," said Jesse.

A hissing, roaring sound above the head of the detective at this moment attracted his attention.

He glanced up and saw that the roof was on fire.

Through a narrow crack he could see a glow of flame, and one or two sparks had fallen down upon the floor below.

He was in great peril.

Suddenly the cry of fire rang from below.

"Get the horses!" cried Jesse James. "Must every horse in the yard and we will show the rival band what it is to tamper with the James Boys!"

The horses were all brought into the yard.

The burning glow of the fire at this moment threw out a light, and the Daltons were firing as fast as they could load.

Jesse James called to all his men to be careful, and keep back under the shadows of the fences and trees.

At this moment the flames burst out all about the house.

Carl Greene, still in disguise, ran from the house as it tumbled into a mass of ruins.

"Hello, who is that?"

"An old fellow who was staying here," said Jesse James.

"Shoot him for luck!" cried Frank James.

"No, hold! Don't harm him," said Cole Younger. "Don't be killing an innocent, harmless old man."

"To horse!" roared Jesse James.

In a moment every man was on his horse.

"Forward!"

Wild yells and cries.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Bang!

The falling of burning timbers, the cracking of guns and pistols made it seem as if pandemonium reigned.

The people who lived in the old house rushed out, for all the woodwork of it was in flames, and the wall threatened to fall in.

Pandemonium reigned.

Carl Greene had a cool head and was not easily rattled, but in the confusion he found himself mixed up with the outlaws, the James Boys and the rival band.

At one moment it seemed as if he would be shot down by a Dalton, at the next trampled to death beneath the hoofs of one of the horses of the James Boys.

He was forced, as it were, along the woods, and when he saw a riderless horse come dashing by him he seized it, and vaulting in the saddle was next moment flying through the woods. He knew not whither he was going, for the frightened horse was utterly uncontrollable.

The horse leaped a fence, it went flying across a field, and never stopped at the next fence it came to but cleared it at a bound and went thundering on into another wood.

Carl Greene at last got control of the animal and looked about him.

He was in a wild, desolate-looking part of the forest.

There was a sort of a path leading from the wood, and he followed this and kept on the course for a long time when he heard a roaring in the distance.

He at first thought it must be the approach of a cyclone, but a moment later became quite sure it was a railroad train.

"It seems that a railroad has penetrated this part of the forest," said the detective, and then he turned his horse's head in the direction of the train and galloped toward it.

Just around the spur of a hill, and he came suddenly upon the railroad.

The train was sweeping down upon the scene.

"Why has it begun to slow up?" he asked himself.

Suddenly there came the gleam of a lantern, which was being waved across the track.

"Hello! It is a signal to stop. Something is wrong," said the bandit catcher. "I will see what it is."

The train went thundering by him, and he galloped along the side of it, his hand feeling for a pistol.

The train was going slower every moment, and soon it came to a standstill.

The voice of the engineer or fireman could be heard further down track, saying:

"What is the matter?"

"Stand and deliver!" roared a masked man with a lantern.

"What! What do you mean?"

Then the man with the mask leaped on the cab of the car, and placing a pistol at the head of the engineer, cried:

"If you don't keep a silent tongue in your head I will put a bullet into it!"

The brave fireman, stooping, seized a poker, but before he could use it he was seized from behind and hurled to the ground by some one without.

Wild yells and shouts went up all about the train, and Carl Greene almost rode over some of the bandits, who were crouching along the railroad, ready to leap into the cars the moment they stopped.

The bandit king sounded a shrill whistle and shouted:

"All aboard!"

Two men who had been assigned to the express, leaped forward and drove a sharp-pointed cartridge at one blow under the express car door.

"Hold on! Hold on!" shouted Carl Greene, dashing forward and waving a pistol in the air. "Don't do it, don't do it!"

But at that instant there was a tremendous explosion, and the car was actually whirled away on one side, being blown completely off the track.

The bandit king saw the detective and cried:

"Who is that?"

Carl Greene was so close to the car when the explosion came that his horse was knocked down by the shock, and for a few moments he was unable to move.

"Inside and to work!" cried the bandit king, who supposed that it was one of their own men who had been knocked down by the explosion, or some of the Dalton gang who had followed them.

"There is no time now to look after such fools as he!"

With loud yells the bandits sprang into the car at the front and rear and began to plunge through it.

"Down! Down! Down!" the outlaws yelled.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

Those shots were harmless.

The bullets went flying through the roofs of the cars, and they were fired in order to frighten the passengers and prevent them from making any resistance at all.

Right and left, in front and rear came the cry:

"Down! Down!"

The bandit king having gained the front end of the train with a bag swung over his arm, went down, calling out in his loud, stentorian voice:

"Come now, my good people, don't let me be delayed. Your money, watches and jewels, and such like trinkets as you can dispose of. Let me have it all!"

As fast as he could go from one to the other, and that was with remarkable agility, the bandit king hastened and took up their watches, their money and jewels.

When his hands were full, and by the way, Jesse James' hands seemed capable of holding an enormous amount—he dumped them into the bag which he carried and went on filling them again.

Where was Carl Greene all this while?

We have seen how he rushed nobly to the rescue of the train, but that an unfortunate explosion had knocked horse and rider to the ground.

He was considerably stunned, but as soon as he could he got upon his feet.

The loud clanging blows of a sledge-hammer rang out on the air.

Carl Greene knew that those strokes were given to break open

the iron safe, in which the money of the express company was deposited.

He went to the express car, and, leaping in, leveled a revolver at the two men at work and cried:

"Surrender!"

They turned about and looked at him in amazement.

"A detective!" roared Jim Cummins.

"Then kill him!"

Bang!

Whiz!

Had not the detective rolled up under the capsized car, he would have been killed by the bullet.

Fortunately he had retained his own pistols, and as he rolled under the car, which, as the reader knows, was derailed and partially broken by the explosion which blew open the door, he fired both barrels of his revolver into the door of the car.

Bang!

Bullets went flying into the side of the shattered door, and the bandits to creep back out of his range.

James Boys had robbed the train, making complete work of the passengers, and hearing the firing back at the express car, came to learn what it was.

"What is the matter here?" Jesse demanded.

"Look out, Jesse!"

"Why?"

"There is a detective here."

"Where?"

"Under the broken part of the express car."

The bandit king leaped on the platform of the next car just as a bullet, whizzing from under the wrecked express, grazed his leg.

"It was a close shave," the bandit declared.

"Who is under there?" asked the bandit king.

"I don't know to a certainty," answered Jim Cummins, "but I would gamble heavy on it being Carl Greene."

are you going to do with him?"

wait until you have the money all safe and sound and I will show you how to smoke out a ground hog."

money is all secured," said the bandit.

"Have you got it all?"

"Yes."

"Then set the car on fire."

"Burn the train?"

"Certainly."

The roaring and crackling of flames above the detective convinced him that the bandits had set fire to the train.

"Twice in one night," he thought, "have I been burned out."

The bandits leaped from the cars, and the detective was about to crawl from his dangerous position when a chorus of yells upon the bank above announced the arrival of the Daltons.

The James Boys had been followed closely by their enemies, and when they found them in possession of the train they did not hesitate to fire on them.

They did not know that the train had been robbed, and hoped to have a hand in the work themselves.

The detective managed during the short fight that ensued to escape, unseen, from the burning car.

The Daltons were driven back into the woods, and the James Boys escaped with all their booty.

Carl Greene followed after the James Boys on foot in a vast and terrible forest, determined to rescue the banker's son, if it cost him his life.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISONER IN THE QUICKSAND.

All these stirring incidents were transpiring, the prisoner, Corbett, was kept confined in a small, narrow cavern, where he could scarce see or hear.

The only persons whom he saw were two guards.

His food was bread and water, and he had hardly enough of that.

He saw his guard but little, but could often hear them talking in front of his cavern.

One night he heard one say to the other:

"This row with the Dalton gang is goin' to end purty serious."

"Yes, it is all about him. They want him, so as to get the twenty-five thousand dollars, and so do we."

"We have got him."

"And much good it does us."

"None at all."

"I don't believe he will ever tell where the money is buried."

"Sh—what is that?"

"Don't hear anything!"

"I do."

"What is it like?"

"Some one coming."

"Well, if it ain't our boys, what shall we do?"

"I don't know."

By this time the trampling of feet was heard within a few paces of the entrance of the cavern.

Then some one called out:

"Say, Bill, here they are!"

"Who are they?"

"Don't know. Say, fellers, who are you?"

Bang!

Then followed a short scuffle, and then the discharge of another pistol, and the Daltons in a moment had the two guards prisoners.

"Now look into this thing and see what it is," commanded the leader of the Daltons, or the rival band, as it was more generally known.

"It's a cave."

"A cave?"

"Yes."

"Well, what are they here for?"

"May be their stronghold, Bill. These may be only a guard."

"Well, some one will have to take the lead and plunge into the cavern," said Bill. "Who will it be?"

"Let us draw lots, Bill."

"No; there is no time to cast lots. Now, come on!" and taking the lead he plunged into the dark cavern, and soon came upon the prisoner.

He carried a lantern in his hand, which showed him the way to the prisoner.

"Hello! Boys, we have found him here," said the bandit chief.

"Who?"

"The very man we wanted, and the one the James Boys took such pains to keep out of our way. The fellow who knows where the twenty-five thousand dollars are concealed."

"Then let him tell."

"Say, youngster, tell us where that twenty-five thousand dollars is buried, won't you?"

"No."

"Well, we will make him."

Bill Dalton then turned to two of his men and said:

"Untie him and bring him along. We will take him to our hut by the quicksands and keep him there until he tells us all we want to know."

"We will plunge him into the quicksands if he don't tell, eh, Bill?"

"You are right we will."

"Then come on."

He was untied and hurried away from the cavern.

He observed that the rival band were all on foot this time, though they evidently had horses not far away, for some of them had spurs on the heels of their boots.

He was hurried many miles through the woods and darkness, and finally they came to a broad, sluggish stream.

On the banks of it was a log cabin standing close by the side of a willow and some scrubby, prickly pears not far from it.

It was an unprepossessing place, and as they hurried along to it the prisoner heard something said about quicksands.

They hugged the solid ground closely and reached the cabin, where they thrust the prisoner into a chair and Bill Dalton said:

"Now, sonny, ye got a pretty hard row to hoe, lemme tell ye, unless ye just 'fess up like a man and tell us where the twenty-five thousand dollars is hid."

"I have no confession to make," answered Arthur, boldly.

"Where is the money?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Why did the James Boys keep ye so long?"

"Because I would not answer the very questions you want me to answer."

"And why didn't ye answer them?"

"Because I would not."

The young prisoner realized that so long as the hiding place of the money was kept a secret, he would not be put to death.

The outlaws went away, and left the prisoner with a guard of but two men.

The day passed and night came.

Some food was brought the prisoner.

It was of the coarsest, roughest kind.

He ate it, however, for he was very hungry, and then he was told that he would have no more for twenty-four hours.

The two men went out and sat at the rear of the cabin. The prisoner could see them through a crack in the wall.

By and by the broad-faced moon arose, and lighted the whole scene with a glorious light.

He was gazing into the bushes and forest, when he suddenly discovered the form of a man stealing stealthily forward.

Slowly and cautiously, from tree to tree, he crept, and came closer and closer toward them, then he paused behind a tree and watched the two men at the rear of the cabin.

The prisoner could not see all this, but what he could not see he could infer from the man's manner.

The guards both had their backs to him and were wholly unaware of his presence, until two taps rolled them over unconscious.

To tie and gag them was the work of a moment, and then he went to the cabin door, carefully moving around it as if he was walking on the edge of a very dangerous precipice.

When he had entered the house he suddenly flashed his lantern over the face of the prisoner and said:

"Hello, my fine fellow, are you here?"

"Yes."

"Are you Arthur Corbett?"

"I am."

"I came to get you."

"Who sent you?"

"Your father."

"Then you must be a detective?"

"I am. I want to ask you one question."

"What is it?" he asked.

"Have they got the twenty-five thousand dollars which your father sent by you to carry over to Fielding?"

"No."

At this moment the sounds of voices were heard coming toward the cabin.

"They come!" said Carl Greene, glancing from the window. "Get out of here as soon as possible!"

At this moment the hateful voice of Bill Dalton was heard, shouting:

"Hello, boys! thar's somethin' wrong here. Quick! Let's see what it is!"

"Away!" whispered Carl Greene, and drawing his revolver he leaped at the side window to get a shot at the banditti.

Bang! went his pistol.

One of the men was wounded, and gave utterance to a yell of pain.

Bang!

Bang!

Crack!

The bullets from their rifles rained about the house; some struck the window-sill at which the detective stood.

He sprang to the door, and to his horror saw the lately rescued prisoner leap out far into the treacherous quicksands.

He sank to his knees, and then making a tremendous leap to rescue himself, went down to his hips.

He called loudly for help, and Carl Greene plunged in after him.

In a moment he had sank to his waist, while nothing could be seen of Arthur save a pair of hands waving in the air.

The broad-faced moon lighted the scene with a brilliance of day.

Carl Greene had caught a tuft of grass that grew on the edge of the quicksands with one hand, and was reaching the other to seize the hand of the sinking Arthur, when the entire band came around the cabin and had an excellent view of the scene.

They paused, and leaning on his gun the chief said:

"Don't fire a shot, boys. The sand will do it. They will find a grave from which there is no resurrection."

And Carl Greene and the youth whom he was risking his life to save, continued to sink.

CHAPTER VII.

JESSE JAMES AND CARL GREENE.

Carl Greene had been in close places and had passed through many struggles, but this was the closest he had ever known.

To extricate himself and his young friend from the quicksands was impossible, and he continued to go down until he disappeared from sight.

There was a momentary choking, suffocating sensation, then he was conscious of his feet striking something hard, and he dropped over the edge of something.

He never entirely lost consciousness, and clung to Arthur's hand, dragging him with him as he sank under what proved to be an old boat that had been sunk in the quicksand and lay bottom side up.

The recent rise in the creek had washed the quicksands from the end of the boat next to the water, and they could breathe.

In a few moments he restored his companion to consciousness.

All was utter darkness under that old boat, and they could hear the sands shifting in perfect torrents all about them.

"Where am I?" Arthur asked.

"Keep quiet!" cautioned the voice at his side.

"I must be dead!"

"No, you are not."

"Then, where am I?"

"Under the quicksands."

"Surely we will soon die, then."

"No, I think not. Wait a moment, or for a short time and then we will see if we can't escape from these wily bandits, who have built their hut by such treacherous sands."

"What is this above us?"

"It seems to be an old boat that sunk and upset in some way."

The late prisoner put up his hands and felt the side of the boat.

"You are correct about it being a boat. Now tell me how we were so fortunate as to get under it?"

"That I can hardly do," said the detective. "It seems to have been more by chance than skill."

They could hear nothing of their enemies while under the buried boat, and Carl Greene, asking the youth to wait at the spot where they were, crept down to the farther end of the boat.

The sand was more solid here, and being damp, they did not go through.

He could hear the rippling of the water below him, and putting his head out of the narrow opening, saw the sky, the stars and moon.

When the banditti had left the cabin the detective called to Arthur and asked him to come where he was.

The young man came.

They crept out from under the boat and came nearly being engulfed in a landslide of quicksand.

But they managed to reach the bank of the stream and plunged into the water.

"The water is shallow," said the detective to Arthur. "Be very careful here or you will touch the bottom, which is all quicksand. If you are dragged under here you will drown."

"I know it."

They struggled on through the water and sands until they were a fourth of a mile down the stream, and then finding the banks more solid, came out upon the ground.

"Take good care to wring the water from your clothes and dry them as soon as you can," said the detective. "We have much to do before we can leave this wilderness."

"If we only had some horses we might leave the forest."

"I have a horse."

"Where?"

"He is about ten miles from here."

"In a barn?"

"No; he is tied in the woods."

"Poor creature. He may starve!"

"We will get back to him before he starves."

The detective wiped his revolvers dry.

The pistols were loaded with waterproof metallic cartridges, and these were not damaged by getting wet.

"Let us lose no time. Come, let's be going."

"I am ready."

They started from the creek and traveled for two or three hours through the woods without meeting with an adventure.

The detective was walking in front.

Suddenly he paused and raised his hand.

"There is a horseman on the hill above us," said Carl Greene, in a whisper.

"Do you really see him?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is he to us?"

"He may be much to us," said the detective.

The horseman was a large, powerful man, mounted on a large black steed.

In the moonlight he looked not unlike some giant statue in black upon the hill.

The detective soon discovered, however, that they were animated creatures and that they were moving.

He crouched behind a tree within fifty paces of the horseman and lay there with a cocked pistol in his hand.

The horseman rode half around him, so that the air, instead of being from his horse to him, was the reverse.

The coal black steed at once began to sniff the air.

"Hello, Siroc! What is the matter, old fellow?" he asked his horse. "What is it that you scent?"

"That is Jesse James' voice," the detective said to himself.

It was the bandit king.

Jesse James knew his horse never deceived him, and though he could neither see nor hear anything, was quite certain that Siroc scented some one.

He started, stared in the direction of the detective, and gave vent to frequent snorts.

"The horse suspects me," thought the detective, "and there is no doubt but that the rider does also."

The detective hugged the tree closely and with a cocked revolver tried to pierce the intense darkness to see who was before him.

In some respects the bandit king had the advantage.

Siroc was an able ally. He kept the attention of Carl Greene directed toward him by his continual snorting and stamping, while the master flanked him to shoot him in the side.

It seemed as if Jesse James would succeed.

But suddenly, just as he was about reaching a place where he might, unobserved, send a bullet to the brain of the detective, snap went a twig under his knee.

In a moment he was on the ground.

Bang!

Bang!

In two seconds two bullets flew over his head.

"Aha! my fine fellow, that gives me a show!" said the bandit king.

Crack!

Crack!

The bullets flew over the head of Carl Greene.

Carl hugged his tree.

Jesse hugged his bush, and with their revolvers they tried to get another shot.

Both were wary, and the thick foliage prevented the moon's rays from reaching them, so they were almost in total darkness.

Carl Greene lay down on the ground, and, like a snake, wormed his way along.

The loud sniffing of Siroc indicated that that noble animal was greatly excited over the discharge of firearms.

The detective remembered Arthur, the banker's son, whom he had left down under the hill. He had given Arthur strict injunctions not to leave the place where he put him until he came for him or called him.

No doubt the youth would obey his order, but if he had him here he would be of excellent service to him.

"I wish he was here," the detective said to himself, while he was about among the trees trying his best to get a shot at the bandit king.

James knew that some of his band were not far from him at that moment, and he was quite certain that if they heard the firing of the pistols they would come to his aid.

He held his revolver ready cocked to shoot the detective the moment he should appear in view.

Jesse James crept around a little nearer to the spot where the detective had last been.

He saw a dark object lying there and leveled his revolver at it. "Mr. Carl Greene, I have you now!" the bandit king thought.

He was no more than four or five paces from the dark object, and he took as deliberate an aim at it as he could in the dark, and then pulled the trigger.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Four shots in about as many seconds rang out, and their echoes sounded and reverberated through the dense wood, arousing the slumbering echoes of the forest.

The detective, or the dark object which the bandit king supposed was the detective, never stirred.

"I think I have done him up this time," said the bandit king. But there was a chance that he had not killed the detective.

Carl Greene might only be playing 'possum with him, and he waited a moment to see if he moved.

He lay perfectly still.

"He is dead," said Jesse James. "My bullets always see straight in the night, and I know I did not miss him."

Jesse James at this moment heard the tramp of horses' hoofs coming through the woods toward him.

Those my own men or are they some of the rival band? he asked himself. "The chances are two to one in favor of my own band, but for fear they are not I will keep my revolver ready to defend myself," said the bandit king.

Jesse James drew a second pistol, and with a revolver in each hand, awaited the result of the approaching band of horsemen.

Suddenly a whistle sounded on the air.

"That is my men," said the bandit king. "It is our whistle." He answered it.

A moment later a voice called:

"Jesse, Jesse, where are you?"

"Frank!"

"Yes."

"Look out."

"Who have you there?"

"Carl Greene."

"Is he the man you have been shooting at?"

"Yes, and I think I have done him up, but you boys had better keep a sharp lookout, he may be only playing possum, and lying in wait to let some of you have a pill of cold lead."

"Where is he?"

"There he lies under that tree. I have given him four bullets, and I am quite sure every one went through his side."

He pointed to a dark object lying on the ground but a short distance away.

Jim Cummins went to the dark object, stooped over it and touched it.

An exclamation of surprise escaped him.

He drew his pocket lantern and flashing a slender ray on it, said:

"Jesse!"

"What?"

"Is this what you have been shooting at and talking with?"

"Yes."

"You can have all the glory."

"Why, what is it?"

"Nothing but a chunk of rotten wood, that is all, and we have been blazing away at it like a lot of ninnies."

For a moment amazement held the bandits dumb.

They made a rush forward and saw a piece of a log of wood lying on the ground before them, pierced with bullets which had knocked the white-coated part of the wood through on the other side.

At this moment there came a loud, wild neigh from Siroc, followed by loud squealing and kicking, rearing and plunging.

In a moment Jesse James comprehended it all.

"Siroc! Siroc!" he shouted to the top of his voice. "The scoundrel is stealing my horse!"

They ran toward the spot.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! came a shower of bullets from the spot where the detective had just mounted the horse and was galloping away.

He was firmly seated in the saddle and flying as fast as he could urge the unwilling beast, before they came to the spot.

"Shoot the scoundrel! Kill him!" cried the impetuous Jim Cummins.

The bandits raised their pistols, when Jesse cried:

"Hold!"

"Why?"

"Don't fire a shot."

"Why, don't you want us to shoot him?"

"No. The rascal is mounted on Siroc. Don't you see you will kill him?"

The bandits ran for their horses, while Jesse sounded the whistle to call back his horse.

Siroc gave utterance to a neigh, but was some distance away, and it was evident that his rider was urging him forward at full speed, taking him further and further away from his master.

Jesse again and again sounded the whistle, running on foot through the woods and making as good speed as he could.

He knew not what direction he was going, nor did he dream that he was running right on to his late escaped prisoner.

Suddenly a man seemed to start up before him.

Bang!

The pistol was fired almost in his face.

"Hello!" cried the bandit king. "What does this mean?"

"Die, bandit!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Three shots more were fired at him at such close quarters that he could feel the powder burn his cheek.

Jesse James, with a howl of rage, flung himself on the slight form of Arthur Corbett and hurled him to the ground.

In a moment he had his arms pinioned to his side and held him fast.

The bandit king then whipped out a knife, intending to take his life.

"Unhand me, scoundrel!" the youth involuntarily gasped, and Jesse recognized his voice.

"What! Is it you? It is Arthur Corbett, is it? Very well, sir, I will just make you secure, and hold you fast, my friend, so you can't escape me again."

The bandit king held him tight a moment until he got some cords from his pocket and tied him hard and fast.

The distant neigh of Siroc protesting against being ridden by the new master, sounded on the air.

The noble beast had served Jesse as his only master, and was willing to acknowledge no other.

He was loyal to his master, and he struggled and kicked against this new claimant.

The horse was loyal to Jesse, crime stained as he was, and one cannot but admire him, even though he served such a bad purpose.

Jesse blew two or three shrill blasts on his whistle, and again the horse answered.

These last blasts were, however, for his men. They came galloping toward him.

He heard them coming, and said:

"This way, two of you only. Jim Cummins!"

"Yes, sir."

"Wood Hite!"

"I hear you."

"Come and take a prisoner in charge. The others fly with all speed to recover Siroc."

"Aye, aye!" responded every man, and a moment later the two men whom he had called came galloping up toward him.

"What do you want?" asked Jim.

"Here is our prisoner who was taken from us by the rival band."

"Arthur Corbett?"

"The same, sir."

"Is it possible! Where did you find him?"

"Right here."

"Maybe the others of Dalton's gang are around."

"No; I know that he is alone. I am certain he was with Carl Greene," said the bandit king.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Take him to the Chalk Grott," said Jesse, in a low tone. "No one knows of that place, and we will keep him there until we have him completely to ourselves—until we can remove him to the old well; then we shall have him where they will never find him again. Now take good care of him; see he don't escape. I am going after Siroc."

He then turned him over to his men, and away he ran through the woods as fast as he could go.

The distant neighing of Siroc seemed to lure him on and on, and he sped over the ground as fast as he could run, crashing among the woods and brambles and briars at every step.

The bandit king stumbled over a log and fell. Next moment one of his own men, mounted on a fleet horse, went flying over his head.

He started up and ran, on and on, calling to his horse and sounding his whistle from time to time.

The horse responded to his call with loud neighs, and it became evident that he was running in a circuit, and the bandit king began to hope that he would soon overtake him.

He shouted again and again to the steed, but Carl Greene made him go farther away.

"Frank James!" called Jesse, to a man who was flying through the wood, for by the strip of moonlight which shone through the trees he saw that the horseman was his brother.

Frank James answered with:

"What will you have, Jesse?"

"Can't you run him down?"

"I will try," was the answer.

He galloped away as fast as he could in the direction of the last sound that he had heard of the flying horse.

The bandit king was not far behind him.

A man cannot outrun a horse unless it is in a dense wood.

There the footman has a decided advantage.

Jesse ran and ran and ran, until he was almost out of breath, and was encouraged by the frequent neighs of Siroc.

He continued to sound his whistle to keep Siroc posted as to his whereabouts.

Siroc neighed, and kicked, and reared, and plunged in his endeavors to unhorse his rider.

Carl never had a wilder ride.

"Get up!" he said to the horse, spurring him on.

With a squeal Siroc kicked, and reared, and plunged in the most dangerous way.

He bucked in the most approved mustang style, and yet in spite of all he could do he was not able to unseat his rider.

Carl Greene clung to him like grim death.

A less skillful rider would have been unseated, but despite his matchless skill as a horseman he was unable to make the horse go any faster.

Had he been able to put Siroc to the top of his speed and keep him at it for some time until they were outside of the forest, he might have escaped, but that was utterly impossible.

Siroc would run but a few rods at a time.

Then he would stop and rear, and plunge and kick, until he was forced on by the cruel spurs in his beautiful flanks.

"Halt!" cried a voice in the rear.

He looked back and saw a horseman but a few rods behind him.

"Halt, or I will fire!"

The man was too far away for a shot, and Carl Greene had no fear of him at that range.

"Harkaway, Siroc, harkaway," assuming the voice of Jesse James, which he was a good deal of.

The animal bucked.

"Away!"

He plunged his spurs into his flanks, and Siroc gave a great bound forward and stopped.

Bang!

Bang!

A pair of bullets came whizzing past the head of the detective.

He paid no heed to them.

He managed to get Siroc into a run, and sped along a long ridge for some distance, and then he suddenly paused again.

"Get up!" said the detective.

He was perfectly cool.

He had heard the shots of the bandit king in the valley and knew that he had found poor Arthur, and naturally supposed that the youth was either slain or a captive.

Bang!

Bang!

Two more shots whizzed past his head, and they struck into a tree close to the right of the detective.

Carl Greene was now in a desperate situation.

He put his horse to the best speed he could make the unwilling beast go, and plunged into a dense thicket of woods, which took him out of sight of his pursuers.

But he was never entirely out of hearing of them.

High on the air rang out that shrill whistle of the bandit king, and the well-trained Siroc invariably answered the signal of his master.

He kept his head turned away from his master and spurred him with might and main, but the horse could not be made to go at the top of his speed.

The detective could even hear some of the pursuers.

"He went into that wood there," said one.

"Did you see him, Cole?"

"Yes."

"Then after him!"

"I saw him, too!" cried Frank James.

"Then after him!"

He heard horseman after horseman plunging into the bushes. At this moment Jesse, who had mounted one of the horses of one of the others, came riding up, and cried:

"Is he in that wood?"

"Yes."

"Surround it!"

"Can we?"

"Certainly. Some of you ride ahead and cut him off!" shouted Jesse.

Carl Greene turned his horse abruptly to the right where there was a narrow bottom covered with grass.

He thundered out into the bottom just as two or three mounted bandits came in sight of him.

"There he goes!" cried one.

"Where?"

"There!"

"Yes, I see him."

"Let him have it!"

"Look out for Siroc!"

"Yes, aim high!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets whizzed above the head of the detective, and he wheeled about in his saddle and sent two or three shots whizzing after his enemies.

One of the bullets hit one of their horses.

He saw the animal limping as it ran away.

Next moment he plunged into a dense wood and was lost to view of any one.

He was in the woods but a moment when he heard the voice of Jesse James crying:

"He went in there!"

"Where?"

"Into the woods directly before you. Plunge in!"

With loud yells the bandits plunged into the woods.

"It is no use," thought Carl Greene. "They will overtake me on this horse and I will have to abandon the animal or lose my life."

The detective was in a quandary what to do, when he suddenly heard the loud clatter of horses' feet before him.

"Siroc, I must give you up!" he said, and he threw himself from the saddle.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MOMENT OF DEATH.

There was not a moment to lose.

The only retreat that presented itself to the detective was an old oak tree that stood near.

Like a squirrel he ran up to the top of the tree, or to a fork of it, and finding a hole in the side crawled into it, just as the horsemen on the right and left came together.

In a moment there was wild confusion.

"The rival band—the rival band!" roared the bandit king.

"The James Boys—the James Boys!"

A mingled roar of words and volleys of shots, and then the two parties hurled themselves at each other.

With a wild neigh Siroc rushed at his master, and Jesse James, leaping from the back of the steed he rode, to his own, hurled himself with such fury against the Dalton gang that he upset two of their horses and made the others fly almost panic-stricken before him.

The Daltons fled, and the James Boys were masters of the field.

"Where is he?" asked Jim Younger.

"Who?"

"Carl Greene."

The James Boys had gathered about the old dead tree in which the detective had made his escape.

"I don't know where he is!" Jesse answered. "He was riding Siroc."

"Jesse," said Frank James, "you must have been mistaken."

"Why?"

"You certainly did not see Carl Greene."

"Why, did they not all see him?"

"I don't know, but it was one of the Daltons whom we thought was Carl Greene."

"Well, I know Carl Greene when I see him and hear him," said the bandit king, "and it was he. But we have no more time to waste here. Let us be going!"

"All right."

Jesse then had the roll called to see who were injured in the late encounter with the rival band.

None were seriously hurt, and as the rivals had all made their escape it was quite evident that they had none of them sustained any great injuries.

"It was a lot of fuss and fury to amount to nothing," declared Jim Younger.

and rode away, and Carl Greene descended from the tree.

aced at the moon, which was sinking low in the western

while the morning star was shining brightly in the sky.

Jesse and his band were gone, and the detective went across the country several miles to the spot where he had left his horse tied.

He mounted the animal and went from the uninhabited part of the Black Forest to that portion where lived a few farmers.

Their buildings were scattered out among the woods, and the fields were small and far between.

The detective left his horse at the house of one of the small farms and went away down the road on foot.

He changed his disguise to that of a man about middle age, and looking very much like a westerner who was traveling in the country, a half tramp and half desperado.

"I think the stage will come along in the evening," he said to himself, as he neared one of the stations where the stage line changed horses.

"Does the stage change here?" he asked the man who stood at the stable door.

"Yas," was the answer.

"How long afore et will be along?"

"Waal, ef she is on time, she will be erlong erbout the set o' sun."

The traveler cast his eye at the declining sun, and said:

"I am tired. I will wait for it."

"Whar yer goin'?"

"Through to the end of the line."

"Waal, I reckon yer kin go when ther stage comes, ef the James Boys don't hold her up afore she gits out of ther woods."

"Do you think there is any danger of that?"

"I dun know. They most allers do."

"Do they?"

"Ther James Boys air in ther woods sun'ars, that air sure an' Martin. Lemme tell yer, and they do say they air in these 'ere Black Forests."

"Who told you?"

"I hearn some o' ther boys say they hed robbed er train, an' law bless yer, they've hed Art Corbett a prisoner fur some time in the woods, ef he ain't already dead."

The detective asked if he could get supper at the station.

"Yes, they will gin yer yer supper, pervidin' yer got ther puter-inktum ter whack up fur et."

"I have," said the traveler.

"Then ye'll git yer supper, an' no doubt on et."

The detective went to the house, which was a low, shanty-like building with only a rude stock and mud chimney, and saw the blackened walls and disgusting look of the place, and thought he would almost as soon go supperless as to eat there.

The supper was prepared by a woman who was half Indian and half negro, and was a very substantial repast.

A few moments after supper, which was at dark, the stage coach came.

The detective was anxious to push on that night to the railroad station and send a dispatch to Timberlake to come and help him with the rival bands.

But the stage waited there until after supper, and by that time the driver had drunk more whisky than was good for him, and waited an hour to practice shooting at a lighted candle with his revolver, much to the terror of the passengers.

At last when he was induced to mount the box he seized the reins and yelled:

"Whoop—whoop! All aboard! Whoop—hooray! They can't beat old Pete Zimmerman!"

After a few moments he again yelled:

"All aboard!"

The people climbed into the stage coach, and the man holding the reins cracked the whip, and sent the stage coach thundering down the road.

Carl Greene sat in one corner, listening to the terrified whispers of a couple of women in the stage.

"It is going to be a dark night," said one of the men.

"Yes, but I believe it won't rain," another answered.

The detective at this moment glanced out of the stage coach, and saw that the sky had suddenly grown clouded.

The storm was coming, he thought.

"I wish this journey was over with," said one of the travelers.

"So do I," put in another.

"I don't like this traveling in the neighborhood of the James Boys. It seems to me that they might catch those fellows, and give people a little rest from their depredations."

"That is what I think I am sure."

"Well, I will be glad when I am out of the State."

"So will I, and I promise you one thing and that is that I will never enter it again."

"That is my fix."

"Missouri is a good State, but I have no love for the pets of these people. They are too fond of robbing and killing people." Then all became silent.

The reader will remember that Carl Greene had had but little sleep for several nights, and was quite worn out.

He leaned back against the side of the rolling and jolting stage and was in a half doze.

He was conscious of some one talking.

He heard the voices of the two men mingled with the voices of the two women and made out that they were speaking of the James Boys.

"It is a shame," said some one.

"That is what I think."

"The chances are we will have to remain here two hours."

"Maybe all night."

"I don't know how we can get around it."

"The driver won't talk."

"Is he sober enough?"

"No."

"It's a mercy that he did not drive us right over to certain death."

The detective now opened his eyes, fully aroused himself and realized for the first time that the stage coach had come to a dead standstill.

"Helloa! what is the matter, gentlemen?" he asked. "Why have we stopped?"

"The bridge is half torn away and we can't get across," said another.

"The bridge?"

"Yes, the bridge. Some one has carried away three or four of the boards."

Carl Greene sprang out of the stage coach and said:

"Gentlemen, let us see what we can do to help the driver get over."

"I am not a bridge builder," said one of the men.

"Nor me," put in the other.

The detective cheerfully answered:

"Neither am I, but there comes a time in the affairs of men when it is well to be anything that will help along with affairs."

"I know it, but I am going to stay here until I am taken across."

Seeing that he could get none of the passengers to aid him, he went to the lead horses which stood trembling on the edge of the bridge, from which three great broad boards had been removed leaving a gaping hole, down through which a horse could have plunged.

The driver, who was somewhat sobered by the terrible peril to which he had been exposed, stood gazing at the gaping hole and said:

"Waal, don't et beat the nashun!"

"I don't know how it could have been done."

"They did et."

"Who?"

"Them James Boys ur ther rival band."

"Why do you suppose they destroyed the bridge?"

"Waal, et air my opinion thet they want ter hold us hyar erwhile until they kin come up an' jist skin us alive, thet is ther way I put et up," said the driver.

Carl Greene asked:

"Can't we repair the bridge?"

"Repair—how? I ain't got no boards, an' et must be ten mile ter whar yer kin git any."

"Yes, that is true, but have you an axe in the stage?"

"Yes."

"Get it."

"What for?"

"We will cut down young trees, and hew slabs out of them, so that we can cross on them."

"By jinks! I never fur er moment thought on that!" said the driver.

"I think it can be done."

"Course et can."

"You always carry an axe?"

"Course!"

"Well, get the axe!"

"I will."

"Bring a lantern with you. Get one of the stage lanterns, and we can hold the light and cut down trees, one at a time."

"Thet air jist what I was thinkin', Them other fellers in the stage who air so blasted squeamish erbout cuttin' logs ur helpin', might be coaxed into holding hosses, while the others do the work."

"They might."

"I'll try 'em."

"Do."

The men grumbled, and at first declared they would not hold the horses under any consideration, and then the driver grew furious and told them they would run the chance then of having their necks broken in a runaway, or having to walk back to the next station.

"What make you folks sich blamed fools fer, anyway?" he asked.

"We did not come here to hold horses!"

"You didn't; nuther did I come hyar ter build bridges, but I'm goin' ter take er hand in ther business!"

"You are?"

"Yes; that other chap an' me, we air goin' ter cut logs, split 'em, and hew 'em down so't we kin make er bridge ter cross on, an' all we axe iz fur yer ter hold ther hosses and look arter yerselves, an' see thet ye don't git yer own necks broke, that air all thet we want yer ter do."

The men held a short, whispered consultation, and decided that they would look after the horses.

"All right, yer kin look arter 'em, ur hev no stage ter ride in jist ez yer please."

Then taking one of the stage lanterns he went to where the detective stood.

"Which will yer do fust, cut ur hold?" the driver asked.

"Give me the axe."

He took the sharp instrument in his hand, and taking a good look at the young tree that he had doomed to be sacrificed to the good of the bridge, he sent the sharp blade hissing into the soft and tender bark.

Blow after blow fell with ceaseless regularity, and the chips flew, and then the tree began to creak.

"Look out, cap! She air goin' ter fall," said the driver.

Creak!

Creak!

Creak!

And with a thundering sound it came down to the ground.

The man with the axe then trimmed off the limbs and small branches close to the body, and proceeded to cut two logs off the body, large enough to extend across the bridge.

It was one of those long, slender oaks which are easily split, and he drove the blade of the axe into the end of the log and spit it open.

He then split the next cut open.

"Waal, doggone me, cap, ef ye don't handle a axe mighty neatly!" said Pete, who was standing at his side, and gazing on with admiration at the skill of the detective in handling the axe.

They took the two halves and placed them where the boards had been taken from the bridge, and then the detective said that they needed one more board, or puncheon, as they called it.

They went to the woods and began to cut again.

The echoes of the axe rang out far and near on the night air, drowning the muffled tread of horsemen approaching the stage coach.

The horsemen silently surrounded the stage and waited until the men came to put in the last slab of wood, which they had hewn from a tree.

Just as they put it down they heard a deep, stentorian voice say:

"That will do!"

"Will it?" asked the driver, turning about and fixing his eyes on the man who had rode forward.

His face was covered with a mask, and he looked every inch a robber, which he really was.

Carl Greene now reflected that he had left his revolvers at the stump, where he had removed them in order to cut the log of wood.

He started toward them, when a voice called:

"Halt!"

"Stop, sir! Don't you attempt to move or you will be a dead man!"

He looked up and saw that they were surrounded by a band of horsemen, who had revolvers in their hands and were threatening to shoot him.

"Halt—stop!"

The last speaker was mounted on a large black horse, and wore a black mask over his face.

He held a cocked revolver in his hand, and was a dangerous, desperate-looking man.

The detective knew by his voice that he was Jesse James, the bandit king of America.

"Now you make an attempt to leave again and I will put a bullet through your head!" said the robber bandit.

The bandit king then turned to two of the masked men at his side and said:

"Guard the driver and this wood-cutter, and we will go and relieve these grandees of their purses."

The bandit was soon rapping at the stage door and saying:

"Hello!"

"Oh dear!"

"How are you?"

"Murder—murder!"

"What do you mean? What is the matter in there?"

"Don't come in here, please!" said one gentleman. "I have heart disease, and I can't stand anything like excitement. I want you to go away and leave me alone."

"No; oh, no! We could not think of being so ill-mannered."

"I don't want to be bothered."

"Yes, we must pester you some."

"Why?"

"Open the stage door and we will then explain more."

"I won't!"

"You shall!"

"Don't. Go away and leave me be!"

"I won't."

"Oh, I'll die! Ladies, some of you fan me, please, I am growing so faint!"

Jesse James could not repress a laugh.

He seized the stage door and with a mighty jerk he tore it almost from its hinges.

"Now, how are you?" he asked, poking the muzzle of a revolver almost into the faces of some of the people who were sitting in the stage coach.

"Oh, don't!"

"Quit!"

"Let us alone!"

"What do you want?"

These and a dozen yells went up on the air, and the bandit king laughingly responded:

"Well, this is as nice a piece of amusement as I have witnessed in a long time. But everything must have an end, so come and give us a complete rest."

"Please, good sir, what do you want?" asked an old lady, who was in the stage coach.

"I want to request you to give up such little trinkets as you don't need, and all the spare money you may chance to have about you."

"Oh, no, no! Never!"

"Come, come, my good woman, you shall be first to make the nation to this great cause. Now let me have those diamond r-rings. They are quite unbecoming one of your age."

"Wretch!"

"And plainness."

"Monster!"

"And ugliness."

"Oh, this is too much! I suffocate!"

"Well, while you are suffocating, I will take charge of your jewels, my dear lady."

She shrieked.

He reached forward and seized her by the shoulder and said:

"You had as well do this peaceably, old lady. I was at Lawrence, and have seen many a woman, younger and fairer than you, go down."

"Oh, horror, horror, I am going to faint!" she cried.

"Before you faint give me your money and jewels, and it will give me trouble and may save you your life."

She began to sob and beg him to spare her.

"No, I spare no one; hand them over!"

"Here they are, sir, please. Don't take my money. I have only got three hundred dollars, and I can't spare any of it."

"Hand it over."

She wept and implored.

"It is of no use. Hand them over."

Having robbed the old woman he turned to the men and said:

"I want you to understand that I will not put up with one-half the delay with a man, that I have with this woman. Hand over your chink, or in less than no time I will send a bullet through your head!"

"Well, here is all I have," said one.

He pulled out a good-sized wallet from his right side pantom pocket, and handed it over.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Don't believe it."

"Honest!"

"Still don't believe it."

"Swear it is!"

"Very well, I am going to search you, and if I find you have any more I will shoot you dead."

"Oh, no, don't, please don't!"

"I will kill you!"

"Why?"

"Because I cannot indulge any one in lying."

"You can't? I won't lie if you won't kill me."

"Let me search your inside pocket."

"Please don't do it."

"Oh, if you have told the truth you need have no fear of me searching you."

"But I have not."

"Have you not told the truth?"

"No."

"Then you have more money?"

"Yes, since I come to think of it, there is a thousand dollars more in my inside pocket."

"That statement has saved your life," said Jesse James, reaching his hand in his pocket and drawing therefrom a large wallet money which he had had concealed in his inside pocket.

The man whom he had robbed groaned.

"Now, my friend, who comes next? I hope you won't

be

"I have you got?"

"Do you prefer to search me?"

"How much have you?"

"I have not counted it recently and could not tell."

"About how much? Speak quick, for my finger has an itching desire to pull this trigger."

"Well, then, say fifteen hundred."

"Pass it over."

The thoroughly frightened man handed him a purse from the pocket of his trousers and then gave him a large inside pocket-book.

"Is that all?"

"Every cent."

"Then I am done with you. Now, my good lady," he said, turning to the other woman, who had a superabundance of jewelry on her person.

"Oh, dear sir, please don't look at me! I am only a timid little creature, and I am just now on the eve of fainting!" said the woman.

"So I perceive, and if you will be good enough to take out those rings, that diamond pin, and remove the numerous finger rings which you have about your hands, you will faint much easier.

Besides, I know you must have some money about you somewhere. You look as if you were stuffed with greenbacks."

"Oh, no, no, no!"

"You have seen the manner I treated these gentle you not?"

"Yes."

"And this lady?"

"Yes."

"Can you expect a less severe fate?"

She was weeping softly but she began to remove her jewelry and take her money from her pocket. In a moment she had made them into a package tied up in her silk, highly perfumed handkerchief, and hurled them at the head of the bandit king, saying:

"There, take them, and I hope I may see you hanged!"

Jesse, catching the package, politely answered:

"Thank you, my dear madam, and whenever that interesting event transpires, I will take great pleasure in informing you, so that you can be present."

He wheeled Siroe about, and cried:

"Bring up those other two men and let me have a look at them?"

The bandits, Jim Cummins and Frank James, had gone through the mail and express, and taken all the money they could find.

The men who were to be brought up to the bandit king were Carl Greene and the driver.

The detective had been surrounded and taken unarmed, as we have seen.

His disguise was so thin that he had little doubt that the James Boys would recognize him if the light of their lanterns should fall on his face, so he had kept back well in the shadows, so that they might not see him.

When he heard the order of Jesse James, he realized that his only hope of escaping death was to make a tremendous effort to break away and escape.

He made a leap past one of the horsemen.

"Hold!"

"Stop!"

Bang!

Whiz!

It grazed his temple, and for a moment stunned and confused him.

Next moment Jesse James, charging like an avalanche down upon him, ran the shoulder of his horse against him with such violence that he was knocked headlong to the ground.

He tried to rise, but the daring rider bending over in his saddle as he flew past him, seized him by the back of the neck and elung to him like grim death.

He bore him back from the darkness into the full light of the lanterns before Carl Greene had hardly had time to recover.

"Hello!" he cried.

"What is it, Jesse?"

"Who have we here?"

"Do you know him?"

"I think I do. Jim, hold your lantern a little closer."

Jim did so.

"Now, unless my eyes have grown to be greater liars than my tongue, this is Carl Greene."

"Carl Greene!"

"Yes."

"Oh, it can't be!"

"Look at him yourselves."

The bandits gathered about him and Jesse James said:

"Pull that yellow wig from off his head!"

This was done, and in a moment every one cried:

"Carl Greene!"

Jesse James leaped from Siroe, and aided by two more strong bandits tied the detective's hands behind his back.

"Hello, my fine fellow!" said the bandit king. "I am more glad to see you than any other man in America. You shall be hanged in three minutes."

"How dare you hang a man who is doing his duty?" the detective defiantly asked.

"Doing his duty, eh? We will see something about duty. Come here at once and bring a rope—bring a rope, quick!"

"A rope—a rope!" cried one and all.

Carl Greene knew it was useless to plead for his life, and became silent.

"Here is a rope," said one of the banditti, taking a rope from the back part of the stage, which had been used to tie the trunk in its place.

"Is it long enough?"

"Yes; it must be forty feet."

"And strong enough?"

"It would hang a horse."

"Then sling it over yon projecting branch."

One of the bandits, who was experienced in throwing a lasso, lunged an end over the limb.

"Wood Hite, you are experienced in making nooses."

"Yes, I have hung several men."

"Make a noose here."

"All right."

He went to the end of the rope dangling down, and in a few moments had the noose made.

"Bring him up and slip it over his neck."

Carl Greene fought and struggled with might and main to break away from his captors, but they held him fast, and dragging him forward, put the rope over his neck.

Three of you take the other end of the rope, and when I give the word go, run him up!"

Carl Greene knew it was his last hour. In fact, his last moment had come.

"One, two, three—go!"

The detective was jerked from his feet and dangled in the air.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOUBLE DEAL.

Bang!

"Death and fury!"

The bandit king leaped two feet from the ground as a bullet whizzed through the air and cut the rope and let the detective fall.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

"Look out!"

"We are attacked!"

"Who are they?"

"There they come!"

"Whoop! Hurray!"

Bang!

Bang!

Whistling bullets all about the bandits caused Jesse James to cry:

"To arms! Repel the attack!"

They fought like heroes. They soon became convinced, however, that they had no weak band to contend with.

"The rival band! The rival band!" cried the bandits everywhere, and they snatched their pistols from their hoister and returned the fire.

For a few moments the conflict raged in all its fury.

The bullets splintered the stage coach, they whistled through the doors, shattering the glass.

The passengers inside lay sprawling and the horses becoming frightened flew over the bridge which fortunately had just been fixed by Carl Greene and the driver, as the reader knows, and for a mile up hill and down they flew, with the four passengers bumping and rolling in the bottom of the stage coach.

Then they brought their ignominious flight to an abrupt end, by running into a tree that stood at the side of the road, and hurling the people inside the vehicle into an indiscriminate mass in one corner of the stage coach.

Meanwhile, the fight between the rival bands was hot and furious.

Some of the members of the Dalton gang, however, began to give way, and then they ran; others followed their example, and the James Boys having mounted their horses charged the remainder so furiously that they gave way and fled.

Carl Greene had been senseless from the moment he was jerked from the ground.

When he recovered he was lying on the green banks of the stream several rods above the bridge, and the stage driver was bending over him.

"Waal, yer come to, hev yer?" he asked.

"Yes. Where are they?"

Carl Greene was at himself in a moment. There was no regaining consciousness by degrees as is usually the case with persons.

"D'yer mean them James Boys?"

"Yes."

"Waal, they hev their hands full. Don't yer hear 'em shootin' erway in ther woods, thar?"

He could hear them quite distinctly, and he said:

"Whom are they fighting?"

"Dun know, cap, bnt ef ye'll listen I'll tell yer all erbout et."

"Go on, I am listening."

"Waal, yer see when ye war lifted up by ther neck and yanked off in ther wny, we thort that yer war a goner. But yer hedn't

hardly got yer feet off'n ther ground when bang! whack! slap! hyar come erbout two dozen fellers on hossback, er raisin' ther Old Nick, yer know, and fust thing we know they war right all mixed up an' shootin' et each other just like er general fight on election day.

"One o' them shots, an' et seemed ter me ter be ther fust un fired, cut ther rope squar in two, an' let yer fall kerflummox on ther ground.

"I seed et all, an' while them chaps war so busy er shootin', and cuttin' and slashin' erway at each other, why, I run right in ermongst 'em and picked you up from a'most under ther hosses' feet and carried yer off. Waal, I brung yer hyar, and hyar yer air."

"And there is no doubt, sir, but that I owe you my life," said the detective.

"Oh, thet air sich a small thing, don't mention et," said the driver.

Carl Greene could not but smile at the unintended wit of the man.

He said nothing, however, and was in a moment able to sit up. Then he asked:

"How far are we from the place where the stage is?"

"Waal, pilgrim, I dun know whar the stage is now, seein' ez them hosses hev run away like fury, but I want ter tell you thet we ain't er great ways from whar et war."

"Then let us get farther away."

"Why?"

"As soon as the James Boys have driven Bill Dalton and his gang away they will come back to look for me."

"Mebbe thar air some danger in that, for I am o' ther opinion that they hev er mighty hankerin' arter yer."

Carl Greene had fully recovered, and he stood up, saying that he was ready to go.

"Waal, come on, then, fur I want ter tell yer we hain't got much need o' layin' around hyar any longer."

They went down the banks of the stream a short distance, when Carl Greene heard the trampling of a horse's hoofs and the snorting of an animal.

"I wonder what thet is?" asked the driver.

"I would think that a man who had handled the ribbons as long as you have would know a horse when you heard one."

"Waal, plague take me fur a fool!" said the driver. "I kinder thort thet wuz er hoss, but I didn't know exactly fur sartin whether et wur ur not."

He then said they might catch it and Carl escape, as he was anxious to go on and pick up the pieces of the stage coach.

"Do you want to go on after the stage and the runaways?" asked the detective.

"Waal, yes, pilgrim, et air my business ter look arter them runaways, I reckon, an' I'm mighty anxious ter be ergoin'."

"Then go."

"Good-by, then. Hyar's er log I kin cross the crick on, an' I'll soon be over et."

The driver sprang upon a log that lay across the creek and went over to the other side, repaired the stage, and drove to the next station.

Carl Greene climbed up the steep bank, among the woods and found a horse that had been roaming about, having, no doubt, lost his rider in the fight.

It was a short, stout little bay, on the pony order, and he knew at once that it was one of the Daltons' horses, for the James Boys made it a point to ride none bnt thoroughbred Arabian horses.

He easily caught the horse, which had become entangled among some bushes, and he soon vaulted in the saddle and went thundering away into the woods.

He felt something about the horn of the saddle, and to his delight soon discovered it to be a brace of holsters which had been swung there.

"I am not wholly unarmed," he thought.

Morning dawned and Carl Greene found himself in sight of a large, elegant farmhouse.

He reconnoitred the premises quite carefully, and then went to the house to secure food for himself and horse.

After both had been refreshed, he left the house, and, going into the woods, tied his horse out to graze, and laid own and slept until the sun was almost setting.

The detective, as the reader will no doubt remember, was completely worn out. He had not had a good night's sleep since he had commenced these perilous adventures.

He was a little alarmed, however, when he awoke and found that he had slept so long in the woods.

"Those James Boys might have come onto me," he said, "and killed me while I slept."

He was not long in mounting and returning to the house where he had breakfasted, and then telling a story that was very plausible.

ble, that he had spent the day in searching in the woods for strays, he ate a supper.

"Hladn't ye better stay all night?" asked the farmer.

"No. I am going over to see a man on Spring Creek about some cattle," he answered. "I am very much obliged to you, but I don't think that I can stay."

"Thar be a mighty big storm er coming up," said the farmer.

"A storm?"

"Yes."

"I did not notice it when I came in."

"Reekin not. Et came all of a suddin."

The detective went to the window and looked out of it, and saw the whole western sky suddenly grow crimson and black.

A great storm cloud was rolling up from the west, that point from whence a storm in that State inevitably comes.

Just then a loud peal of thunder broke on the air.

"D'ye hear that?" asked the farmer.

"Yes."

"Better stay. Comin', sure."

"I believe I will."

The detective had intended once more making an effort to get to a telegraph station and send a message for Timberlake and a posse sufficient to cope with either the James Boys or the rival band.

"Waal, yer hoss is safe," said the farmer. "He's got his belly full o' corn an' oats, and he's snug an' dry."

"I am aware of that."

"Make yerself easy, jist make yerself easy, fur all air goin' all right."

The detective again looked from the west and saw the storm coming on with fury.

A night in the woods with such a storm as that would be unpleasant and not profitable, and he decided to wait until it was over before he attempted to leave the house.

He complained of being weary with his long day's ride, and expressed a desire to retire early.

Consequently the farmer showed him up to his room, and in a few moments he was sitting by the window, looking down the storm-swept road.

The thunder roared, the lightning flashed, and the rain beat upon the hard road until the water ran in little, dirty, yellowish rivulets.

Suddenly he discovered by a flash of lightning a horseman coming at a gallop toward the house.

The traveler was so cloak covered and muffled up, to keep out the rain, that he could not see his features.

He called loudly at the gate, and the farmer, with an umbrella, came out, and after a short conversation, which the detective could not hear, he went with the stranger to the barn, stabled his horse and brought him back to the house.

"That was evidently a traveler like myself, caught in the rain."

The man was, in a few moments, shown upstairs, and took a room adjoining the one in which Carl Greene slept.

There was only a thin, board partition between those rooms, which had been once papered.

But there was a knot-hole in the partition wall, and the detective was not long in applying his eye to the hole, and scarce had he got a glimpse of his neighbor than he thought:

"That is Bill Dalton, if I ever saw the man in my life."

At this moment he heard another halloing at the gate, and on looking from the window saw by a flash of lightning a second horseman waiting and demanding admittance from the storm.

Again the landlord with his old, faded umbrella went forth to help the man put his horse in the barn.

In due time he was ushered upstairs, and the detective heard him ask as he reached the hall:

"Have you any other guests to-night?"

At sound of the voice the detective started and said to himself: "Jesse James, if ever I heard him speak in my life. Why, this is going to be a double deal. I have always heard it said if you will cease to chase fortune, fortune will come to you, and I almost believe it. I have been chasing these bandits for some time, alone and single-handed, and just as I am about to give them up for good they come right into my hands."

The detective considered them as good as his prisoners.

"Yes, I have two more," said the farmer.

"Two others?"

"Yes."

"What kind of men are they?"

"One of them is a cattle dealer, and the other one I dun know what he is," said the farmer. "He looks like he might be a cowboy."

"Well, as long as they are peaceable, that is all I care about them," growled the bandit king, in his gruff, braggadocio manner.

"They are peaceable. There is no doubt about that," said the farmer.

"What rooms are they in?"

The rooms that the two men occupied were pointed out by the farmer, and he then said:

"Now, ye kin hev this un across ther hall ef yer want et, or I'll give yer another erlongside o' this man thet sleeps hyar."

"No, I don't care to sleep there. Give me the one across the hall."

The farmer opened the door and let him in.

"There is no lock here!" growled the bandit king.

"Waal, yer don't need any."

In a few moments the house was all quiet.

Carl Greene waited until it was buried in slumber, and said:

"Now for my double deal."

He arose, and with a revolver in one hand, crept to the door of his own room.

The two other men who slept in the house seemed to be actuated at the same moment by very murderous designs.

Jesse James and Bill Dalton both rose from their beds almost at the same instant.

Bill had heard the sound of Jesse's voice and knew him, and Jesse had seen a horse in the barn which had led him to believe that his enemy and rival was at the farmhouse.

Consequently they each determined on the destruction of the other.

When Jesse James opened the door he found the hall intensely dark.

He crept out with his hand on the butt of a pistol, just as Bill came with his hand on his knife.

The two men were so silent that neither heard the other.

A third man came to his door just at the same moment.

The scene promised to be a lively one in the dark.

The bandits were compelled to make a little creaking noise, which each heard.

Then each knew that the other was coming.

Carl Greene heard the same slight noise himself, and he took from under his coat a dark-lantern.

"There may be a double deal here, and a sort of a three-cornered triangular fight," said the bandit catcher.

The two men cautiously advanced in the dark.

They had taken the precaution to remove their boots, and their feet made no sound save the floor creaking under their weight.

Jesse James held his breath and crept boldly forward, and Bill Dalton, equally as bold as himself, began also to advance.

In a few moments they were at each other and flew together like a pair of bull-dogs.

Down they fell and rolled over, clutching at each other's throats, and neither daring to use the weapon he held.

Carl Greene at this moment flashed a light upon the terrible struggle, and bounding forward by a dexterous twist of his hands slipped handcuffs on the wrists of the two men, handcuffing them together.

"A neat double deal!" he cried:

CHAPTER X.

THE BANK ROBBERY AT SARDINA.

Before either of the combatants knew what the detective was about, or hardly aware of his presence, he had disarmed and handcuffed them together.

Jesse raved, and Bill roared like a captured lion.

"Keep quiet, boys, it will be better for you," said the detective.

"What is the matter up there?" asked the farmer, who had been aroused by the confusion and uproar of the two men resisting the detective.

"Come up here!" said Carl Greene.

"Say, are you uns fightin' up there?"

"No, the fight is all over."

The old man then, with a lantern in his hand, came creeping up the stairway and said:

"Waal, I don't want ter git into a row."

"Do you know who your guests are?" Carl Greene asked.

"No; who are they?"

"This man is Jesse James," pointing to the bandit king.

"Why, la! ye don't tell me so!"

"Yes, sir."

"And who is t'other feller?"

"That man is Bill Dalton."

"Is it?"

"Yes."

"And who are you?"

"I am Carl Greene."

"What!"

"I am Carl Greene, the detective."

"Why, great guns, gin me yer hand! I mought a-knowed ye

were Carl Greene, for no other man could a-tuk in them two princes o' wickedness except yerself!"

"They are safe enough now; you need not fear them."

"I don't, erbit, so long as you hev them both handcuffed."

"Well, now I want you to do me a favor."

"What?"

"Help me to get them to the nearest jail."

"I'll do that."

"How far is it to the nearest jail?"

"'Bout twenty-five miles."

"Can't you harness up your horses to your wagon and take us there?"

"Yes."

"Well, will you please do so?"

"I will see erbout et. If my ole woman ain't afeered ter be alone."

The old man went down to where his wondering wife was waiting to learn what had caused the trouble.

He came back, soon, and said:

"I'll go; but hadn't we better wait until the storm is over?"

"I think not; it may last all night."

"No, it is almost over."

"But then we will have very little of it to hinder us," said the detective.

"You want ter go at once?"

"Yes."

"We'll do it."

Carl Greene looked to the handcuffs on the men, and finding them to be all right, he left them and went to the barn to assist the timid old gentleman to harness the horses to the wagon.

The farmer was so afraid that some of the members of one or the other band was lying in wait ready to seize and murder him the moment he went outside of the house that he dared not go out alone.

"Never do you fear, then," said the detective. "I will go along as your guard and see that you are safe from all harm."

The old man harnessed his horses while the detective held the lantern.

Jesse James and the chief of the rival band were left alone in a room, and for a few moments after the bandit catcher was gone they were silent.

Dalton was first to speak.

He said:

"Jesse, we made fools of ourselves that time."

"I have been thinking so myself."

"We had better been fighting the common enemy, Carl Greene, than wasting our time on each other."

"I am quite sure you are right," said the bandit king.

"How much longer are we going to act a fool, this way?"

Jesse James gave his wrist a simple but dexterous twist, such as jugglers and sleight-of-hand performers do, and in a moment his hand was free.

"How did you do that?" Dalton asked.

"It is a simple enough trick when you know how."

"Yes, I suppose it is, but I don't see how one can learn how."

Jesse released his other hand and said:

"As you are not into the secret, it will take a file to get the handcuffs off your wrists."

"I suppose that it will. But where are we to get the file?"

"All things come to those who have the patience to wait."

He then began with a file which he drew out from the collar of his coat to cut the handcuffs in twain, and in a very few moments had them in two.

When the detective left them alone he had only taken the time to disarm them, and had paid no attention to what they might have about them.

It is doubtful if he would have looked in the collar of the bandit's coat for a file, or even dreamed that he had such a thing about him.

But the bandit king was prepared for almost any contingency, and whether a captive or captor, he seemed equally at home in expedients.

In a remarkable short time he had Dalton free.

"Now, it is my opinion," said Jesse James, "that we should be leaving right at once."

"How?"

"The window, the gutter spouting!" said the bandit king.

He knew that if they attempted to go down the stairs the woman or some of the children would see them and they would raise an uproar that would bring Carl Greene on the scene, and they had no desire to meet Carl Greene.

"I wonder if that spoutin' will hold our weight?" asked the bandit chief of the rival band.

"It must."

"Who will go first?"

"It makes little difference. If the spouting falls we will be

killed or badly injured, then captured and hung; and if it don't fall, then we will escape."

"You go first."

"All right."

Jesse James threw up the window as nimbly and as boldly as if he was merely going out at the door, and in a moment clung to the spouting and swung himself down.

Dalton watched him, and when he was at the bottom he clung tightly to the spouting and let himself down.

The bandit reached the ground in safety and with but very little noise.

"Now let us go to the barn and see what they are doing with our horses," said Jesse.

"The plan suits me," answered Dalton.

The rain had almost ceased by this time, and yet it was cloudy and terrible dark.

The light of a lantern glimmering from the barn indicated where the detective and the old farmer were.

"Now if they just let Siroc alone," said the bandit king, "I will be gone in no time."

The wagon had been run out in front of the barn door, and the old farmer was busily engaged in harnessing the horses, while the detective held the lantern up for him to see.

"What a glorious mark for a shot, if I only had a gun or pistol!" the bandit king thought.

When the farmer's horses were harnessed the old man asked:

"Now what are you going to do with the horses of the outlaws?"

"We will lead them behind the wagon," said the detective. "Bring them out."

"Shall I saddle them?"

"Yes."

Carl Greene stood near the wagon, a lantern in one hand and a cocked revolver in the other.

He knew not but that the old farmer, despite all his apparent innocence, might be a friend of the bandits, and there was a possibility of them having more men near at hand to come to their rescue.

The bandits, being unarmed, were unable to raise a hand to defend or to strike the detective.

But they determined to watch their chance to steal their horses away as soon as they could.

The chance came when the detective and the old farmer left the team hitched at the front door and went upstairs to bring down the prisoners.

"Now is our time!" whispered Jesse, and they made a dash at their horses and quickly untied them, and, mounting, galloped away.

They executed the manœuvre so neatly and completely that the detective did not hear them.

He came back from finding the bandits escaped, to find their horses gone.

Jesse James and Dalton rode in company for about two miles, and then the bandit king separated from him and returned to his band, which was not more than ten miles from the farmers' house.

"Something must be done to draw the detective, Carl Greene, from this forest," said the bandit king.

"Well, what will we do?" asked Jim Cummins.

"I think we will start out and rob a bank, a train, or stage coach, or do some desperate deed in order to attract the attention of the detective, and then we will return in the course of a few days."

"It is a good idea," returned Jim Cummins.

"How is our prisoner?"

"He is doing well."

"And has he good guard?"

"Yes."

"See that we have ten men ready to ride anywhere and do anything by to-morrow morning," said Jesse.

Jim Cummins was the second lieutenant of the band, and was usually the one who executed orders.

Jesse went to sleep and slept until next morning, then he arose, and had a breakfast, and called for Siroc.

The band was already in their saddles, and Jesse, mounting, flew away from the woods.

The town of Sardina, Missouri, stood on the banks of the Missouri River.

It had once been a thriving little village when the packets plied regularly up and down the Missouri River, but the building of railroads has almost completely destroyed the steamboat business, and the packet no more is seen in the Missouri.

Railroads have shunned it so far, until to-day the village has disappeared off the map of the State.

At the time of which we write Sardina was on the decline, but it had not reached the bottom of its downfall.

There was a well-filled bank there, and the bandits had long gazed on that bank with covetous eyes.

They had resolved at some time to make it an object of one of their visits.

It was the afternoon of a lazy day in autumn, and Sardina seemed sleeping herself to death.

The clerks were sitting on the counters, the usual loafer stopped to gaze up at the sun that hung low in the sky, and the bank cashier seemed to be anxious for the time to come when they could close up his bank and go to sleep.

That bank was the wealth of Sardina. Without it the town would hardly be worth living in.

The cashier was a careful, honest man, and people had come from a long distance to deposit in his bank.

The people of the village had all their hard earnings deposited in the bank.

Just at this time the bank had an unusual amount of money in it.

Two strangers, riding into the city, caused some comment.

"Wonder whar they come from?" one asked another.

"Now yer got me. Can't say ez I ever seed 'em afore," returned one of the men.

"Nur me."

Then two men, who were evidently hunters, as they carried double-barreled shotguns across the pommels of their saddles, came riding into the village, and these caused still more comment.

The strangers met and began to talk.

To anybody it seemed as if they were about to make a horse trade, or were discussing the merits of their horses.

Others came up to where they were, and in a few moments as many as a dozen men were gathered about the two men who were talking.

Of course not all these were bandits; some of the village loafers and sensational lovers had come to see what was the trouble, and listen to the excited discussion between the horsemen.

Then there were other bandits coming into the town and they suddenly charged down upon the bank, firing revolvers in the air and whooping and shouting and dismounting at the door of the bank, the two men ran in.

"What does this mean?" asked the amazed cashier.

"Give up your money!" roared one of the outlaws.

"What?"

"The money of the bank. Over there, Jim, and at it!"

"Not much!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bullets seemed to rain about the head of the cashier, and believing himself shot in a dozen places he dropped down to the floor.

In a moment all was uproar and confusion outside.

The outlaws were firing revolvers in every direction and the streets were soon cleared of men.

Jim Cummins and Jesse James, with bags in their hands, in a few moments had the last dollar and the last cent of the Sardina bank, and were flying away, scattering in different directions, and seeming to be going in any other direction than the Black Forest.

Carl Greene was completely amazed and dumfounded by the robbery of the Sardina bank, while he was watching the forest and expecting the banditti to return to it.

He was carefully making a search of the forest for the hiding place of the banditti, when the news came.

He had telegraphed for Timberlake and a posse of men, and they had come just as the news reached the detective of the robbery.

"What do you think of this?" the big sheriff asked.

"I hardly know what to think," answered the bandit catcher.

"They are not in the forest."

"No. Sardina is beyond the limits."

"And they were not coming this way from the last reports."

"No."

"Well, what were they doing?"

"Going directly away from here."

After a few moments' silence, the bandit catcher said:

"Timberlake, I am quite certain that the whole thing is done to throw us off the track."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"Well, when and where will we find them? They don't seem to be coming here at all."

"I am of the opinion that the best thing we can do is to wait until they come back, for they will come back to the Black Forest before the thing is over with."

"How do you know they will come back?"

"Their prisoner is here. They recaptured the young man, I am certain, and have him a prisoner somewhere in the woods, but we will find him."

Timberlake uneasily kicked his boot heel into the ground and said:

"I feel as if some of us ought to be on their trail."

"Why? If we let them alone they will come back to us."

"I don't know that they will."

"I don't think I will leave the Black Forest."

Timberlake waited twenty-four hours longer, and then hearing that the James Boys had been seen up in the upper county, he came to the conclusion that it was his duty to give them chase, and they set out, he and his men.

Carl Greene remained in the vicinity of the Black Forest and wandered about it, sometimes in one disguise and sometimes in another.

One day, disguised as an old man, which was his favorite disguise, he met a buggy in which an old man and an old woman were riding.

As they were going directly toward the Black Forest he began to question them at once.

"Howdy?" he said.

"Howdy!" was the answer from the old man.

"Do yer live close erround hyar?" asked the detective.

"Yes."

"How fur from hyar d'yer live?"

"'Tain't more'n ten miles."

"Wot is yer name?"

"We are Mr. and Mrs. Jimison."

"Jimison! Yer bean't old Uncle Jimmy Jimison?"

"No, my name air Bob, and this air my wife, Sally."

"Glad ter meet yer. Wot's ther noos down on ther crick?"

"Nothin' much."

"All well?"

"Purty well, thank yer; how air yer yerself?"

"Oh, I'm just midlin' like."

"Nice weather, hain't et?"

"Yes, ef et keeps on dry this way, shouldn't be surprised we don't need some rain."

"That air jist what I war er tellin' Joe Biler this mornin'."

"Yes?"

"I think thet we will hev a better time next week than this."

"Hope so."

Then just as the old man and woman showed a disposition to drive on, their interrogator asked:

"S'pose yer hearn all erbout the robbin' that air bank at Sardina?"

"Waal, yes, we heered suthin' erbout et."

"Did yer?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear who did et?"

"People think et was the James Boys."

"But et might ha' been ther rival band."

"Don't think et was."

"Why?"

"Chrys Chandler, who war in Sardina at ther time, says he saw 'em, and he said et war ther James Boys."

"Does he know 'em?"

"Yes."

"Waal, ain't Chrys given ter lying?"

"I dun know."

"I heard he wuz."

"Who told yer?"

"Bud Lorton."

"Waal, Bud hain't got no room ter talk," put in the old woman, speaking up for the first time. "I tell yer wot's ther fact, stranger, Bud Lorton kin lie ez fast as a dog kin trot."

"I don't know him much."

"I know him uv old."

After a bit they separated, and the detective cantered down the road a short distance and drew rein.

"I don't believe they are what they claim to be," he said. "No such people as they claim to be live in these woods."

He wheeled his horse into the bushes, and started along the side of the road in the direction the man and woman had gone.

He failed to come in sight of them any more, and dismounting from his horse began to examine the road.

"They did not travel along this road," said the detective. "They have gone some other direction."

He then started back down the road, and had not gone far before he saw the tracks made by the old buggy where it had turned aside into the bushes.

"Here is where they have turned aside," he thought.

Crack!

Sharp and keen the report of a pistol rang out on the air.

Whiz!

Zip!

The ball came flying through the air and touched the head of the detective.

He dropped to the ground.

Scarce had he done so when he saw a man come running toward him with a revolver.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets dug up the ground all about the detective.

They knocked the grass into his face, and he returned the fire so rapidly that his would-be assassin was compelled to retreat.

The detective sprang to his feet and ran into the bushes on the other side of the road.

He listened.

He heard voices just across the path.

"Who was it, Jess?" said one.

"I know it was Carl Greene."

"In disguise?"

"Certainly."

"Then we can very easily guess what he is up to."

"Yes."

"Did you hit him?"

"I don't know."

"I wish we could kill that rascal!"

"So do I."

"Why don't you pump a few bullets into him?" asked Jesse.

"There is nothing to shoot at."

"Nothin'?"

"No, nothing."

"What is the matter with shooting just under that puff of smoke that is floating off so lazily?"

"I had not thought of that."

"Do it quick before the smoke drifts entirely away, and we lose our opportunity to hit him."

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The shots rained into the little clump of bushes, cutting off the branches and leaves.

Jesse said:

"If some of those did not nip him, they must have come very close."

"But, Jesse, how do you account for his shifting about so much that we can't get a sight of him?" said Jim Cummins.

"I don't know. He changed his position, somehow, since we saw him last."

"Yes, he fired the last shot further up the hill."

Suddenly there came another white puff of smoke curling up from a bush fifty yards away from the last.

The ball went humming through the air, passing above the heads of the bandits.

They looked at the little cloud of light blue smoke, and then at each other in amazement.

"Jesse!"

"Jim!"

"Did you ever?"

"Well, no, I did never!"

"This is close picking, I am thinking."

Then they saw, standing on a large, flat rock, about fifty yards still further away, on the hillside, the form of a man, whom they made out at once to be none other than Carl Greene, the detective.

"Jesse!"

"Well?"

"He seems to be defying us."

"It looks that way."

Jesse James drew his largest pistol and laid it down on the stone in front of him.

He took a long and deliberate aim at the man standing on the distant hill.

For a moment a breathless silence pervaded everything, and then there broke on the air a sharp, keen report, and a puff of smoke suddenly curled up on the air.

The distant figure was seen to topple and reel and then fall to the ground, where they could not see it.

CHAPTER XI.

CARL GREENE LOST.

"There, you hit him for a certainty!" added Jim.

Jesse James coolly blew the smoke out of the muzzle of his pistol, and said:

"I think he felt that. Watch him, Jim, and if he tries to get up, give him another!"

"I will."

Jim Cummins watched for some sign of the man.

But there was none.

"Can it be possible that he is dead?" asked Jim.

"I don't see anything remarkable about it, if he should be," said Jesse. "My bullets usually go straight."

"Well, let us go over and see what has become of him."

The bandits had to leave their horses on the side of the ravine where they were, and went down into the ravine and across it to the other side, where they began to climb up the hill.

There was a little scrubby bunch of bushes growing along the rocks, and it was behind these that the detective had fallen.

They reached the spot, and no detective was to be seen either dead or alive.

The outlaws exchanged glances, and for a moment amazement held them dumb, and then the bandit called Jim Cummins said:

"Jesse, don't it beat all creation?"

"It does."

"That fellow has a way of changing himself into air."

"No, he has great skill in making himself small and crawling away," said Jesse.

At this moment the bandit king heard the sound of a whistle over in the direction the horses had been left, and the chief said:

"The other boys are coming back. I know they are."

He answered the signal, and then they hastened to meet them.

Not ten paces away, behind a large slab of stone scarce large enough to conceal him, crouched Carl Greene, the prince of detectives.

The James Boys little dreamed what danger they were in when they stood before him, and he could at any moment have shot both of them dead.

But Carl Greene had seen their companions coming, and knew that he could not much longer conceal himself on that almost barren hillside.

Jesse's bullet had really struck him on the shoulder, but it was so much spent that it only inflicted a slight bruise.

The detective was not long in making up his mind what he would do.

He had no doubt but that the James Boys or some myrmidons would be sure to find his horse, and he resolved to go after them on foot.

"In this wilderness a man on foot has many advantages over one on horseback," he thought.

He followed them for a long distance, and when he came in sight of them at last they were fully a mile away, going across a piece of bottom land.

He stood for a long time looking after them, and then said:

"It is going to be impossible for me to overhaul them to-night. I must look out for some place to sleep."

It was nearly night—the sun was already setting, and before long it was so intensely dark that he could not see his hand before his face, when he was in the most dense part of the woods.

He was making his way along, having got off the road, and straggled into a pathless portion of the forest, with nothing save the stars to guide him, when he suddenly came upon a house.

No surprise in the Arabian Nights was ever greater to the heroes of those impossible tales, than was the finding of this house.

As we have said, it was in a pathless portion of the forest.

He saw that the house was a large one, and stood in a bit of cleared land.

The trees which grew there were farther apart and the light from the stars falling upon the building showed it to be a full two-story house with doors and windows.

It did not seem as if any one had been near it for years, for the weeds and small bushes were grown up all around it.

Carl Greene thought:

"I had just as well make this old house my sleeping-room for to-night. It will be better to sleep here all the night than to go all night long through the woods, or to spend the night in a tree."

He went up to the front door and pushed it open.

To his surprise the door was not locked.

When he had the door open he entered and looked into the intense darkness of the room.

Then he took a lantern from under his coat, and turning on the slide, allowed the light to come out of the lantern.

He gazed about the room. It was furnished, and all in an excellent state of preservation.

He saw many evidences of a once happy home. In one corner of the very room where he slept there was a small cradle in which a babe had once reposed. In a wardrobe hung some dresses and other garments of female attire.

Who were these people who had lived in this vast forest and

What this pleasant home? What had been their fate? he asked himself.

By the style of the clothes which he found in the wardrobes, and the furniture, he was quite sure the house had not been many years vacated.

He sat up on the side of the bed and once thought of examining it more thoroughly, but lay down, being almost completely worn out, and again closed his eyes.

There was mingled with his vision the faces of the strange people who had inhabited the old house in the long ago.

He was half asleep and half awake, just verging into either land, when he seemed to hear a child cry in the little crib that he had seen in one corner, and was sure, a moment later, that he heard a mother's voice singing a soft lullaby to her babe.

Then he seemed transported into another being, and was met by the hospitable owner of the house, and all was gayety and peace, until some one inadvertently mentioned the James Boys, and the whole scene was immediately changed.

A loud stamping of feet, and a voice, soft and tender, reached his ear, "They come!"

So vivid, as some dreams are, that he awoke and sat on the bed shivering with an unknown terror.

He heard below him the loud trampling of feet, and then a voice, which he knew only too well, said:

"This is luck!"

"Shall we bring the horses inside, Jesse?"

"Isn't there a barn or stable?"

"Yes."

"Well, put them in that."

"All right."

"They are in want of feed."

"Well, if you find the barn as well provided as this is we shall have plenty of feed for the horses."

Then some of the men went away.

"Come in, Cole," said the voice of the bandit king.

"All right; here, Bob, take my horse."

The detective heard two pairs of heavy riding-boots upon the floor, and Jesse said:

"Hear the scraping of chairs over the sanded floor, and their places."

When they were seated he heard Jesse James ask:

"Cole, this house is a dandy!"

"Yes."

"Do you know anything about it?"

"There is a story connected with it, if it is the house I think it is," said the bandit lieutenant.

"What house do you think it is?"

"It must be the Boone Hampton house."

"Is there a story connected with it?"

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

"Boone Hampton was a captain in the Union army."

"Yes."

"He inherited a large fortune soon after the war, and coming to this western frontier country he built this house in the wilderness, intending to buy up all the land near and in course of time be immensely wealthy."

"It seems that Boone Hampton had an ungovernable temper. Generally he was a pretty good fellow, but if he got mad he was dangerous. He became mad at almost anything and everything, and those who were about him might expect an outburst at almost any moment."

"Such a monster should have been kept caged."

"It would have been better for him. You see, Boone had a hired man named Charley Mingus. This Mingus was an honest fellow, but rather slow. He was not only slow but was dull of comprehension. He could not always comprehend what the good man told him, and so one day made some blunder which so infuriated the master that he seized an axe and struck him dead at his feet."

ed, and cried:

"What have you done?"

Mingus and his son were the only witnesses to the terrible crime, and seized by a momentary frenzy and a desire to destroy all witnesses to his crime, he struck them dead at his feet, and then it is said buried them with his own hands and left the country."

"All efforts made to find him were in vain."

"Some say he was heard from once in South America, but it is doubtful if it was him who was heard from or not. In the course of time this house was reputed to be haunted and was shunned by all. No one has ever molested the furniture or the house, and it stands just as it did on that clear, bright, spring morning when he committed the terrible crime and left the country."

"So that is the story?"

"Yes."

The tramping of feet were heard without, and Cole Younger said:

"Here come the other boys!"

The other boys entered the house, and Jesse James asked:

"Well, did you find good quarters for the horses, Jim?"

"Yes, pretty fair."

"Found any feed for them?"

"Some oats and stale corn, but the hay was no good."

"Well, well; we will give them a feast when we can," said the bandit king. "For the present we must make the best of a bad bargain."

"I heard that this house was haunted," said Frank James.

The band laughed.

"It will be all right," the bandit king declared. "We will be molested with no ghosts while here."

"I think, Frank, that we had better light some of these candles and search the house from cellar to attic," said Jim Cummins.

"Why are you going to do that?" asked Wood Hite.

"For the benefit of Frank James."

"I don't want any benefit," said the bandit.

"Then let it be for the benefit of all of us. For one, I want to have a look at this quaint old house which has so many strange stories afloat concerning it."

"So do I!"

"And I!"

"Me, too!"

"Come on; we'll turn the old thing topsy turvy in less than no time!"

"Whoop! Hurray! Come on!" cried a dozen voices.

The detective turned out the light from his lantern, and in a moment closed the door of his room to keep from being seen.

He was puzzled to know what he should do if the James Boys came to the door of the room in which he was.

"I will keep out of their sight as long as possible," he thought.

He crept into the room at the window and saw that an active man could climb from the window-sill to the window of the next room without any difficulty.

He went slowly and carefully to the window and raised it.

The plate of the window-sill was very wide, and he placed his toes on the outside and lowered the window.

Then he placed the toe of his other foot on the window of the next room.

He was now outside.

"Here, let us look in these rooms, boys, and see if we can find a ghost," said one of the band.

The doors were flung open.

Candles were flashed inside, and the voice of rollicking Jim Cummins was heard, saying:

"Come out, ye ghosts—rise up from your tomb and let us see what you are like!"

The detective had to cling with all his strength and skill to the narrow window plates, where only the tips of his toes touched, and hold with a thumb and finger above his head to keep from falling.

He was not long kept in this suspense, however, for the bandits said:

"There is nothing here in the shape of a ghost," and slamming the door, went to searching the other rooms.

Carl Greene then climbed in at the window and went to a chair and sat down.

The bandits could be still heard in the hall talking.

"There is no ghost here."

"No; I am satisfied."

The banditti roared, and one said: "Let us go down and quit this nonsense."

"I am agreed to it."

So they all trooped down the stairway and left the detective alone.

He feared another visitation, and determined to make his way into the attic, just as soon as an opportunity offered.

He opened the door and made a start to the attic.

Jesse James, who had remained below, asked his men:

"Did you search the house carefully?"

"Yes."

"We didn't search the attic, boys."

"You did not?"

"No."

"Then you have neglected looking in the very place above all others that you ought to have searched. If any one was hiding here you would find him either in the attic or cellar."

"Then let us go back to the attic!" cried one of the banditti.

"Yes, let us go back and search the attic."

"Hurrah, for the attic!"

They made a dash for the stairway just as Carl Greene, reach-

ing up his hands as high as he could, and by making a leap, caught on the side of the trap to enter into the attic.

The rays of light flashed on the stairway at the very instant that the board with a great lot of plaster gave way, and Carl fell back to the floor with a loud crash. He was lost!

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE BOAT.

"What was that?"

"A ghost!"

"A ghost! A ghost!"

Frank James and Bob Ford were in the advance, and when they heard the crash and fall, down dropped their candles, and, wheeling about, they ran down the stairway at such a headlong pace that they stumbled and fell down the stairway.

Down they came, bumpity bump, from the top to the bottom, or almost to the bottom, taking half a dozen with them.

"Fools!" roared Jesse James. "What is the matter?"

"Something fell up there!" cried one of the bandits.

"What was it?"

"A ghost!"

"A horse!"

"Fools! it was neither. There is some one in the house!" roared the bandit king, and with his lantern in his left hand and his revolver in his right, he bounded up the stairway two steps at a time.

"Carl Greene was just rising from the floor, all covered with dust and plaster when Jesse James gained the top of the landing.

"Hello!" he cried. "Who are you?"

Carl Greene raised his revolver.

Bang!

Bang!

Two shots rang out almost simultaneously, and the detective felt a bullet graze his cheek.

He had sent his bullet straight at the middle of the bandit king.

It struck the brass buckle on his belt, and the chief of the James Boys turned sick, grew dizzy and fell back down the stairs.

"He has killed Jesse!"

"They have killed Jesse!"

"Avenge the chief!" cried the outlaws.

With a hoarse yell of vengeance the banditti rushed up the stairway, and, with yells, opened fire.

Carl Greene had crouched behind one of those thick, old-fashioned couches, and laid his pistol along the top of it.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets from the banditti's revolvers cut the top of the couch and splintered the wooden parts of it, and sent them flying in every direction.

The detective was not much behind them in shooting, and far more effective.

The bullets rained like hail among the banditti, and he saw two or three of them go howling, with wounds, to the bottom of the stairway, and the whole band retire lower down the steps so as to be free from his shots.

Carl Greene saw his opportunity and made a leap again at the trap door above him and caught on to the side.

Most of the candles had been extinguished and the hallway was in almost total darkness.

The detective was not seen.

Clinging with his hands for a single moment he jerked his legs up into the attic.

"Where has he gone?" cried Cole Younger, running to the top of the stairway with a cocked revolver in one hand and a lantern in the other.

"Who is it?" asked Jim Cummins.

"How many are there of them?" asked Wood Hite, wiping the blood from his cheek, which had been furrowed by a bullet.

The banditti now came pouring up into the hall.

"Don't you let him escape!" cried the bandit king, again bounding up into the hallway.

"What, Jesse, ain't you dead?"

"No; thanks to that thick buckle on my belt, I escaped unhurt. But I have a bruise on my body."

"Hurrah! the chief is not dead!"

"Nor even wounded!" cried another.

They all rushed into the hall where the detective had been seen, and flashed candles and lanterns in every direction, asking:

"Where is he?"

"What has become of the rascal that dared shoot at Jesse James?"

"He is gone."

"Where?"

"Into the attic."

Every eye was turned in that direction, just as the detective drew his foot from the opening.

"There he is!"

"Let him have it!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang! bang! bang-ang-ang!

The air was filled again with smoke, and the bullets made the plaster and dust come rattling down the attic upon the hallway beneath.

There was momentary confusion on the part of the men, and then Jesse James said:

"Stop firing!"

"Why, have we killed him?"

"No one knows, and never will know, so long as you have filled the house full of smoke and dust."

"Who is he?" asked Cole Younger, who had not yet got a glimpse of the bandit seeker.

"It is Carl Greene."

"What! The detective?"

"Yes."

"You saw him, Jesse?"

"I did."

"I wonder how he got in here?"

"That I don't know. And we have no time to ask how he came here. Let us roast him out; that is the best thing we can do for him," said the bandit king.

They made a dash at the opening in the attic, but a few well-directed shots drove them back.

"Stop, that won't do," said Jesse James. "We will lose some of the men if we attempt anything of that kind. I think we had better burn the house."

"That is it—smoke him out!"

Carl Greene heard this cruel proposition, and making his way along the attic, drew his stout-bladed knife and stuck it up into the top of the roof.

It went through.

A few well-directed strokes and he cut a hole through the roof sufficiently large for him to crawl out of it, and he reached the comb of the house.

Here he paused for a moment to gain his breath.

"They are going to burn the house," he thought. "If they set it on fire before I get down I will certainly be lost."

He went at last to the place where there was a great stack of chimneys, and felt his way along them. He managed to find a lightning rod.

"That rod leads to the ground," he thought, and I have only to follow it to get there myself."

He discovered that the rod was firmly planted in the brick wall of the chimney, and he crawled back down the sloping roof holding to the lightning rod.

The fire had been started, and the house would ere long burst into a mass of flame.

The bandit king was standing on the east side of the house, and his men gathered about him.

"Guard the doors and windows," said the bandit king. "He may take a notion to spring out at them at almost any moment."

"We are guarding them."

"Who is on the west side of the house?"

"There is no occasion to guard the west side of the house," said one of the bandits. "There is not a single door or window there to be guarded."

"Then we will not pay any attention to that."

"I feel very grateful to them for being so considerate," thought the detective, as he climbed down the long lightning rod.

He clung to it as tightly as he could, until he was nearly at the ground, and then letting go his hold he dropped to the ground.

Carl Greene had no sooner touched the ground than he sprang to his feet and began to run away toward the stables where the horses were.

He was going to seize one of the bandits' horses, and mounting it, make his escape.

But he was hardly quick enough.

"There he goes!"

"Who?"

"It's the man from the house!"

"It's the detective!"

"It's Carl Greene!"

Jesse came running around the house like a madman, and began yelling:

"Why don't you shoot? Fools, shoot!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets whizzed so close to the head of the detective that had he not leaped behind a tree he would have been struck by some of them.

"Don't let him escape!" roared Jesse.

With wild yells the banditti rushed at the tree.

A man suddenly darted away from it, fired two or three shots at the advancing men, and then disappeared into a thicket.

"Plunge in after him!" roared the bandit king.

His men obeyed him, and in a few moments Carl Greene heard them hard at his heels.

"I hear him!" said Jim Cummins, who, with Jesse, was in front.

"Then let him have it!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets whizzed close to the head of the flying detective.

They shattered the tender bark of the trees close to him, and cut off the branches from the top of the bushes and they dropped all about the detective.

The bullets rained about him, causing him to accelerate his speed.

At last, before he knew it, he was on the brink of a precipice.

Before him there was a great yawning chasm, which he had not seen in time to prevent himself from plunging over it.

Down, down he went, crashing through the bushes and vines and falling over the bluff.

Splash! he came into a stream of water.

He felt the cool liquid dash up all about him, and was somewhat revived from the shock of his fall by it.

Jesse James and his avenging band were just on the bluff above the detective.

The fall of Carl Greene, and his splashing in the water had notified Jesse and his men of their own near proximity to the precipice.

"Look sharp!" cried the bandit king. "The detective has fallen over the precipice and is drowned!"

"Perhaps he is," said Jim Cummins, "but the chances are that Carl Greene is pretty hard to drown."

"Look sharp, anyway!"

The detective, finding that he had no bones broken by the fall, began to glide about, noiselessly, in the water, and soon ran against some hard substance, which he made out to be a boat.

He climbed carefully into the boat and it went gliding down stream.

"Hark!" said the voice of Jesse from the bank above.

"What do you hear, Jesse?"

"A ripple in the water."

"Is that all?"

"Well, Jim Cummins, you need not speak lightly of that," said Jesse James. "Where there is a ripple in the water there is something that makes the ripple, let me assure you."

"Then it is he!"

"Of course."

"Let us shoot him!"

"Pick up some fagots of wood. Some dry sticks."

The bandits did not have to search long for these. Carl Greene had heard all that they said, and in the meanwhile was feeling about in the boat for something to paddle it with.

He found a broken oar, and began to push out into the stream and hurry down it, with all the speed possible.

The detective knew he must get as far from the shore as possible before the blazing fagots were thrown into the water.

He saw lights spring up along the shore at intervals of every few feet, and then the blazing fagots were hurled out into the stream, lighting it up far and near.

He plunged his paddle deep into the water and sent the skiff flying out on the stream.

At this moment the burning brands went flying far out into the stream.

"There he goes!" roared Jim Cummins.

"Where?"

"Out there in a boat."

"Then fire at him!"

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

A perfect fusillade of fire and bullets rained about the fleeing detective.

"There, he is hit!"

"No, he is not."

"Did you see him reel in the boat?"

"He has a charmed life."

"No. It is the motion of the boat, and the distance he is from us, and the darkness, that makes a shot uncertain."

"Run down the stream, there!" cried Jesse James. "Get more fagots and light them and fling them at him so that we may see to shoot. Keep it up and we will drive him ashore at last or sink him!"

The men, with whoops and yells, came running down the bank of the stream, flinging the burning brands far out into it and lighting it up far and near.

"There he goes!"

"Quick, now; he is pulling for the other shore. Fire!" cried Jesse.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

The bullets flew like hail about the detective. They struck in the stream and splattered the water all up about him, and made the detective pull harder for the opposite shore, which he reached in time to climb out on the bank as another volley of bullets came splattering in the mud about him.

The detective hastened up among the bushes.

"There, it is all up, now," said the bandit king. "We will never get him now."

"No."

"That is, not this time," put in Jim Cummins.

The detective sat down on a log by the side of the road, and taking off his clothing, piece by piece, wrung the water out of it and then examined his pistols.

They had become wet in his fall into the creek, and he soon wiped them dry, and then started again.

As he was crossing a ridge in the forest he discerned a pale, thin, blue smoke that came from the camp-fire of some one, and he determined to go to it and see who had built the camp-fire.

Slowly and carefully he crept forward on his hands and knees taking great care not to be seen by the persons in the camp.

"It can hardly be the James Boys," he thought. "I surely let them behind me somewhere. Now it is impossible that they can be here in front of me, menacing me with a camp."

The detective crawled through the bushes a little closer, and parting them with his hands peeped forth into a sort of a ravine.

There were a dozen stalwart horsemen with spurs on their heels, sitting about a camp-fire, while their horses were grazing on the green grass that grew about the camp.

The detective was hardly close enough to recognize their features, but he felt quite sure that they were not of the party from whom he had just escaped, and so he crawled closer.

He was soon near enough to hear them talking.

"I don't think they did it," said one.

It seemed they were conversing about the absence of some one.

"Why?"

"He is too shrewd."

"Carl Greene is a shrewd one, but the best of them will be taken in some time."

"Yes, but it was not him."

"There is no need for you to be too certain about it. I tell you he is all right. He will turn up in due time."

"Well, Mr. Timberlake, I am glad to know that you have such implicit confidence in Carl Greene."

The listener smiled as he heard this. He knew that the men who were discussing him were his friends, and that he would be safe when he was once more in their presence.

"I am quite certain that Carl will turn up sooner or later, all right, and that we will yet discomfit those fellows."

"It is time he was doing so."

"I suspect that it is ourselves that should be turning up," said Timberlake. "He had more sense about these matters than we did. While we were running all over the country in search of the men who had robbed the bank, he stayed in the woods, saying they would come back."

"There is every indication that they have."

"And he stayed with them."

"You are right."

The detective took a step or two nearer.

He knew the men he had to deal with.

They were friends whom it was dangerous to approach unannounced, for they were exceedingly quick on trigger, and might put a bullet through him before they learned he was a friend.

Only a few feet nearer and to the right was a stump of a tree that had been broken down by the last gale, and he crept forward to it and lay down behind it to listen to what the sheriff and his posse were saying, before he announced himself.

He observed that they were silent, and smoking their pipes, eyeing each other suspiciously.

Slight as the noise was that he had been compelled to make, it was quite apparent that some of them had heard him, for they were eyeing that portion of the woods in which he was concealed, suspiciously.

At last Timberlake said:

"Let us saddle up."

Then the time had come to act, and the detective, bounding to his feet for a single instant, called:

"Timberlake!"

Down he dropped behind the stump.

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

Bang!

It was well for him that he dropped behind the stump, for a minute later he would have been riddled with bullets.

Not less than six pistol shots were imbedded in the rotten stump which screened him from the shots of his friends.

When the smoke rolled away he again peeped forth to see where the bandit seekers were, but they were nowhere to be seen.

Strange and impossible as it may seem, they had entirely disappeared.

Even their horses, which had been hobbled out to graze, were gone, and the saddles, blankets, bridles and all had disappeared, as if by magic.

"They got out of sight quick, but that will not be the last I will see of them," the detective said. "They will know who I am before they shoot again."

He sat down on the log to wait.

A moment later the bushes parted and a man came forth from the forest to where the detective sat.

"Hello, Carl!"

"How are you, Timberlake?"

"We have been uneasy about you."

"What is the matter with you, Timberlake? You fellows seem a little nervous. What is the cause of it?"

"Well, we have some just cause to feel a trifle nervous, my dear sir. These woods are full of the most dangerous set of precious knaves that the world knows anything about, and they have no love for us."

"You ought to know I was not one."

"I did know it, but then we can't always control the excited men."

"Call in your scattered chickens."

Timberlake blew a whistle and then sat down on the log by the side of Carl Greene, to wait.

"They will be here in a few moments."

"Well, well! Was it you we were pegging away at behind that stump?" asked one of the deputies, coming forward.

"Yes," Carl Greene answered.

"We were wondering what had become of you."

"Yes, and you gave me a warm reception on my return," answered Carl Greene, with a smile.

The sheriff and his deputies once more returned to their camp.

"When did you eat last, Carl?" asked Timberlake.

"I think it was some time yesterday."

"Then you must be hungry."

"Well, I might enjoy a tart, if it was not too large," he answered, with a smile.

"We have some crackers and dried beef, out of which we have been making a meal, and will give you some if you wish it."

"In the absence of anything more dainty I can't refuse," said the detective.

While he was eating his breakfast he told them that he had seen the James Boys, and passed a part of the night with them.

"Well, you certainly had some very narrow escapes," said Timberlake, when he had finished his adventures.

"Yes, it seems that I am doomed to have narrow escapes, and while they are unpleasant for the time being, when it is all over I feel glad that I escaped at all."

"I suppose it is more pleasant as a reflection on the past than as a realization," said Timberlake.

"It is."

"Well, Carl, what is the programme now?"

"We will start at once to discover the hiding place of the prisoner."

"You will not start to find the James Boys?"

"Not exactly. The prisoner is the main feature of our search now. If we should inadvertently come across the James Boys and have a racket with them before the trouble is all over, we cannot help it and will not seek to avoid such a conflict, but the main object of all our efforts now is the rescue of Arthur Corbett."

"Where is he?" asked one of the deputies.

"Well, if I had known that all along, he would have been at liberty before you came here," said Carl Greene. "But, unfortunately, they have kept his hiding place a profound secret."

"Then we will have to hunt it."

By this time they had all finished their breakfast, and the detective gave the order to saddle up.

Fortunately they had a horse for him, and he was soon mounted

with the rest and galloping along the road or rather path, and a very dim path at that, which seemed to lead to nowhere in particular.

Carl Greene and Timberlake were in the lead, and riding side by side.

The forepart of the day was spent in searching the forest for the prisoner of the outlaws.

They, having no clew, were compelled to search at random, which is the most unfruitful search in the world.

"I don't believe we will ever find them," said one of the deputies, when they had halted for the night.

The detective said:

"It is both foolish and wicked to be despondent. Never anticipate trouble. It will come soon enough without borrowing it. Look on the bright side, and imagine that only the best will present. Let us station a guard about the camp and all go to sleep. We shall need all the rest we can get."

"That is a very sensible idea," said the sheriff.

"Now, Tim, you know your men better than I. I want you to put the best on guard, for there is no doubt but that we will have trouble before morning."

The sheriff appointed men for the work of guards, and in a few moments Carl Greene wrapped a blanket about him and lay down to sleep at the root of a tree.

The detective was sadly in need of rest.

Not only had he undergone a great nervous strain, but a great physical strain as well.

He had slept scarcely any for several days, and had been in motion nearly all the time.

Now that he was in the midst of his friends, he felt that he might indulge in a little slumber, and he slept peacefully and quietly.

The tired man, living amid toils and dangers in a far-off land, was once more transported to the peaceful scenes of his own fireside.

The voice of wife and loved ones once more sounded on and he was in raptures.

Pleasant dreams are so few, as real pleasures of life one regrets to awake from a bright, beautiful dream.

The detective was suddenly awakened by the sharp crack of a rifle.

He started to his feet.

Bang!

Bang!

Whiz!

Whiz!

"Look out! Tree—tree! or we are all dead men!" yelled one of the deputies, running in from his post. As he dashed past the detective he cried: "Indians—Indians!"

Carl Greene had drawn a revolver as he rose to his feet, and gave a sharp look into the wood beyond that circle of light.

The flitting forms of men could be seen advancing toward them through the woods. They were all on foot, and were painted and decked out like Indians.

For a moment the detective thought that they really must be Indians, but after a few moments he reflected that it was impossible for there to be any Indians in the country.

He was certain that they were the James Boys or the rival band made up as Indians.

"Hold! Don't run!" he shouted, in trumpet tones of thunder. "Tim, stand your ground!"

Then came the clarion notes of Timberlake from the other side of the camp-fire:

"Take trees, boys, and give them vengeance!"

The yells of the attacking party, the constant cracking of pistols and rifles, the whoops and shouts of the combatants made up a din that was terrible to contemplate.

"Jesse James!" cried one of the deputies. "If it is you, come on and we will give you enough of it ere we are through!"

The masked men, disguised as Indians, dashed right forward until they were almost within ten paces of the camp-fire, when a well-directed volley drove them back.

Then Timberlake, unable to control his own impetuosity, shouted:

"Charge!"

The voice rang as if a trumpet had suddenly sounded forth in the wild cry, and the men leaped spontaneously and simultaneously forward after the masked foes, with yells of vengeance.

Pistols, rifles and shotguns rang out on the air, and the bullets flew thick as hail.

"Shoot from the shoulder!" roared Timberlake. "No shooting at the stars!"

The masked foes fell back, then retreated, then ran for life on a signal whistle from Carl Greene called all the men back.

"It won't do for us to become scattered," he said.

"We did not get a single Indian," said Timberlake.
 "They were not Indians," Carl solemnly declared.
 "What! Not Indians?"
 "No."
 "Then what were they?"
 "They were either the James Boys or the rival band, disguised as Indians, fighting us."
 "I believe you are right," said one of the deputies, "for one fellow's headgear came off while he was running, and if he was not a white man then I am very much mistaken."
 That was the opinion that all or at least many of them shared.
 The detective and Timberlake held a conference, and the detective said:
 "We had as well stay here for the remainder of the night."
 "Why not pursue them?"
 "That may be just what they want us to do."
 "Why?"
 "If we should be close to the hiding place of the prisoner they might take it into their heads to draw us off by an attack like the one they have made."
 "That is true."
 "We will stay until morning."
 "And then?"
 "Then we will resume the search."
 "Don't you think they will attack us again?"
 "If they do we will drive them back. Give orders to your men to put out the fires, and double the guard."
 In a few minutes the camp so lately a scene of carnage and confusion was all quiet.
 The detective, after assuring himself that the camp was all safe, laid down and went to sleep.
 They were undisturbed during the remainder of the night, and at early dawn the detective and sheriff were astir.
 "What have you for breakfast?" asked Carl Greene.
 "Some of our men killed a deer this morning before daylight, and we shall have an abundance of broiled venison steak."
 They had breakfast and as soon as the meal was over started once more to search for the hiding place of the prisoner, without paying the least heed to the band of masked men who had attacked them the night before.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROBBING A STORE.

"So the detective, Carl Greene, has received reinforcements, has he?" said Jesse James, on the next morning after the attack had been made on the detective's camp.
 "Yes," said Jim Cummins, who had been sent out as a spy to learn what had become of Carl Greene, after he escaped by falling over the bluff and crossed the stream in a boat.
 "I knew that Timberlake was not far away all the time. Did you say that the rival band had a fight with them?"
 "Yes."
 "When?"
 "They had two. First fight was before Carl Greene had joined them, and the last conflict was last night when they disguised themselves as Indians and made an attack on the camp. They were driven back, and I suppose those deputies fight like demons."
 "Yes, that is what I suppose. But we have got to get rid of them. What are they doing now?"
 "They are not hunting for either us or the rival band. Their object seems wholly to be to find the man whom we have prisoner and are keeping safely."
 Jesse, after a moment's silent reflection, said:
 "Let them search."
 "Are you afraid that they will find him?"
 "No."
 "Why?"
 "He is in a place where no one will ever find him."
 "Where is he, Jesse?"
 Jesse smiled.
 "No," he said, "no one but myself and the two guards, whom I placed to watch over him, has any idea where he is; and we will tell no one. They can't find him, and if any of the band are captured they cannot be made to tell where this hiding place is, simply because they don't know."
 "What are you going to do, Jesse?" asked Jim Cummins.
 "I think we will take a new lead."
 "What?"
 "We will quit the forest."
 Jesse had his lieutenants called in consultation, and asked them what they thought of leaving the forest to the rival band and

the deputies under Carl Greene, neither of whom had any idea of the place where the prisoner was concealed.
 "I believe it would be an excellent plan," said Cole Younger, "unless they should find out where the prisoner is in the meanwhile and release him."
 "They can't do that," said the bandit king. "They might walk right over him a hundred times or more and not have the least idea that he was near them or they near him. Now you all know where Grimes' store is?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, old Jimmy Grimes has never been a friend of ours."
 "No; he put Wicher onto us once, and he came near catching us, too."
 "Yes, and we owe him something."
 "We do."
 "And for my part," put in Jim Cummins, "I am always glad to pay such debts."
 "We want to get square with Jimmy."
 "Indeed we do."
 "Then," said Jesse, "his store has an unusual amount of money in it. It has a large safe in it, which is made the depository for half the people in the county, there being no bank or place of safekeeping that one can deposit money in."
 "We might make quite a haul there."
 "We shall no doubt take in quite a good lump."
 "Yes, no doubt we shall."
 The bandit king then commanded the boys to get ready, for they would start on the morrow for the store of old Uncle Jimmy Grimes, as he was known.
 Old Uncle Jimmy Grimes was a man well known in all that part of the State.
 He was rather odd and eccentric, but at the same time he was a generous, good-hearted old fellow.
 He had an ungovernable temper, and was constantly in a row with some one. Many times it was the best friend he had.
 He was brave as a lion, and when the James Boys had been in the neighborhood he was one of the first to volunteer to go and help hunt them down.
 It was at the close of a gloomy day.
 The store of old Jimmy Grimes represented one of the most complete general stocks one nearly ever saw.
 There were calico goods, dry goods, green goods, groceries, hardware, drugs, and, in fact, everything from a tin whistle to an elephant might be found in the stock, which was simply mammoth.
 The counters were piled with goods.
 The shelves were covered with them, and there was an abundance packed away in the many nooks and corners of the store.
 In the centre of the store stood a mammoth iron safe, almost large enough to put a team into it.
 It was fireproof, but was by no means burglar proof. Yet when the combination was turned on the old man imagined that he was safe from any robbery.
 The great safe contained not only the money of the store, but, as we have stated, was the depository of half the surplus funds of the county.
 "I tell ye, Bob," said the old merchant, "ye may say what ye will about the banking business; for my part I am going to be my own banker."
 "Yer wise, Uncle Jimmy."
 "Now, when I put ther last dollar o' my change inter that safe and turn the lock or combination on et, I defy the James Boys or any one else to get it out."
 "So would I."
 "I tell you just what it is, they may say what they please, but that old safe is safe."
 Just then they heard the trampling of hoofs.
 Bob was lighting some lanterns and making ready for the night.
 They usually had some customers and many loafers after night, and were getting ready for them.
 The evenings were not cool enough for a fire in the stove, and yet the great stove still stood in its place in the centre of the long, wide building for the loafers to gather round, talk, and squirt tobacco juice over.
 Suddenly there came a trampling of horses' feet.
 "Hurry up, Bob!"
 "Yes."
 "Some one is comin'!"
 "I hear 'em!"
 "They will be in soon, and we must be ready for 'em."
 "Of course we must."
 Then came the stamping of feet at the door, and Uncle Jimmy hastened forward to see who it was, elevating his glasses as he came, to have a good look at the newcomers.
 There were five or six men.
 All were total strangers to him.
 "Waal, what do you want to say?" asked the old man.

"Are you Uncle Jimmy Grimes?"

"Yes."

"Pretty well known, are you?"

"Yes."

"Make lots of money here?"

"Waal, a purty considerable amount."

"Where do you keep it?"

"See that?"

He pointed to the large, iron safe.

"Yes. Why, that is a perfect monster."

"Yer better reckon it air er monster."

"It holds a great deal."

"Yes, but et ain't entirely full ter-night."

"You do have it entirely full sometimes, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Wish we had come when it was entirely full."

"Why?"

"We would get more."

"Get more?"

"Yes."

"More what?"

"Money."

"Why, la bless me, what on airth d'yer mean?" asked the merchant.

"Do you know what we came here for?"

"No."

"We came for money!"

"I ain't ergoin' ter give yer any."

"Oh, yes, you are!"

"No, I won't!"

"Do you see this?" said Jesse James, drawing a small Derringer pistol from his pocket, and, cocking it, leveled it at the head of the merchant.

"Y-y-yes," stammered the old man, turning somewhat pale, "I reckon I see it!"

"Well, I mean business. Now hand over the safe. Open the combination of it and don't you squeal!"

"I won't!"

"Do you want to die?" said Jesse, clapping the muzzle of the small pistol to his head.

"No."

"Well, this is a small weapon, I know, but it will send a bullet through your head. If I pull the trigger it will be the end of you!"

"Then pull away, for hang me if I am going to open the safe!"

"What! Not to save your own life?" asked Jesse.

"No!"

"Shoot quick, Jesse, and let us have it over with!"

Jesse James was so vexed with this that he said:

"We will show you, you old fool, that we don't need the combination of your safe to enter the vault. Here, Bob Ford, Jim Younger, tie him."

He passed the old prisoner over to the two men whose names he called, and then turning to Frank James and Wood Hite, said:

"You have your burglars' tools with you?"

"Yes."

"Put the squibs into that safe and we will soon have it open, or we will know the reason."

The two men alluded to went with braces and bits of cold steel and began boring into the solid iron door of the safe.

In an incredible short time they had six holes bored into the door of the safe, boring them completely through the outside plate and into the hollow plaster paris part.

The old man saw them drive six cartridges or fuses into the six holes and then the bandit king asked:

"Have you got the blasts all ready?"

"Yes."

"Then stand clear!"

Six fuses were thrust into the holes and all lighted.

They had hardly got out of the way when:

Boom!

The report shook the entire building to its very centre.

The house was full of smoke, and Jesse James cried:

"Guard the doors, my men, and see that no one enters until we have looted the store."

The bandit king and two others found thousands of dollars in the safe.

In fact, the store yielded them almost as much as a bank would have done.

Next they robbed the money-drawer, and then left the store, mounted their horses and galloped away.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LONE TRAVELER.

A week since the robbery of the store has passed.

The James Boys, not hearing anything from Carl Greene or the

rival band, had made a division of the money, and dispersed various directions, going in bands of twos and threes, and some times singly.

Jesse James, disguised as a hunter, was riding Siroc along lonely road in the edge of the Black Forest. The sun was setting and the great, broad, red rays were shooting out in every direction.

The bandit king noticed far ahead of him, going over the green hill, a solitary traveler.

He was on horseback, and from the manner in which he rode he discovered that both rider and steed were very tired.

He said:

"I wonder what that can be? The chances are it is Carl Greene in disguise."

Jesse waited until the horse and rider dipped over the hill, and then urged Siroc to the top of his speed, and in a few moments he was on the top of the hill and saw the man below him riding at a slow pace.

"He has not even looked behind," said Jesse James.

He was confident that the man was not aware of his presence.

The coat and make-up of the man showed him to be a well-to-do business man.

"How do you do, stranger?" cried Jesse James, galloping up to his side.

"I am fairly well, how are you?" asked the stranger.

"I have no reason to complain."

Then he came alongside the stranger and asked:

"How far are you going?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?"

"No, stranger."

"Don't you know where you are going?"

"I must confess, my friend, I don't," said the lone traveler. "I am in great distress."

"What has distressed you?"

"A son."

"A son?"

"Yes, sir."

"What has the boy done?"

"He has disappeared, sir. He was no unruly boy to bring gray hairs of his parents in sorrow to the grave. Arthur was grand, noble youth. He would obey me if he died for it. His obeying me caused his ruin, I fear."

Jesse James was somewhat interested in the story, and asked:

"How is that, stranger?"

"Well, you see, I am a banker, living at Warrenton."

"Yes, sir. It seems to me that I heard something about a banker's son being missing. He was killed, was he not?"

"Alas, I don't know."

"How was it, anyway?"

"I had promised Applegate & Co., of St. Louis, to send the \$25,000, you know, on a certain day. On that day it seemed to me that I never had as many calls for money in my life. I never had such a rush of business. People thronged the bank and asked for loans and bills of exchange, and drafts, until I was completely frustrated and forgot the package of money."

"How much was the money?" asked the bandit king.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"That is quite a nice little sum."

"Yes."

"Well, go on with your story."

He then related the incidents of his son's disappearance and his efforts to find him, which had proved of no avail.

The pathetic tones of the old man were enough to melt a heart of stone.

The youth was his only son, and he had all along blamed himself for having sent him off with the package of money on such a night.

He had resolved to find him or lose his life in the attempt.

"This may be a hazardous ride for you, Mr. Corbett," said the bandit king.

"I would not turn back if I knew it would be my death," answered.

"How far do you expect to go to-night?"

"I don't know. I shall go until nightfall comes, and then will go so long as I can, or until a suitable place is found for stopping, and I will stop."

"Are you acquainted with the Black Forest?" asked Jesse James.

"No."

"Then it is fortunate that you fell in with me."

"Why?"

"I know the Black Forest quite well."

"Do you, really?"

"Yes."

"Well, maybe you can direct me?"

"I can. If you will ride with me we will come upon one

these deserted houses which are so common in Missouri since the war. We can there find shelter and pass the night quietly."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you trust yourself to me?"

"Yes."

"Then come on and we will soon reach a place where you will be quite comfortable and safe."

They rode on and darkness soon overspread the earth. than if he had had a royal Bengal tiger for a companion.

They rode on in the darkness of the night, and at last came in sight of the deserted house in which the band was to meet that very night.

When he and the lone traveler reached the house, the bandit king said:

"Here we are at last. Now you can rest here in perfect contentment until morning, and then we will set out to find your son."

"Will you help me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, sir, you know not how thankful I am to you for your goodness," said the father of Arthur.

"Come, now, lay down and go to sleep. When you have slept for a few hours we will be ready to do something."

There was a ladder leading up to an attic chamber, and in this the bandit had the traveler lay down upon a saddle blanket, while he returned to await the return of his band, which he knew would be along soon.

"I will have it all my own way now," the bandit king said to himself. "We will have both father and son, and we shall make it so hot for them that the mouth of the young rascal will be opened. He will tell what he did with the money or he will be made stand and see his father hung by the neck until he is dead. If he has no fear of death himself, perhaps he can be made, on account of his father, to give the secret away."

At that moment a pair of sharp eyes were watching the bandit king from a distant tree, and a pair of sharp ears were strained to catch all that was said.

But the listener was too far away to hear a word.

Even while he listened there came a distant tramp of horses' feet upon the ground, and the detective withdrew into the deeper wood to listen and wait.

Jesse James was expecting his band, and when he heard the tramp of the approaching horsemen he was quite certain that it was they.

He had placed Siroc inside the old house, and in order to make assurance doubly sure, he brought him out and stood with one foot in the stirrup until they came near enough for him to when he blew a soft note on his whistle.

is a satisfactory answer.

vs, no doubt."

But yet such extraordinary caution did the bandit use that he was not content with this, and still standing with one foot in the stirrup, and a pistol in his hand, he called aloud:

"Who are you?"

"The followers of the crimson banner!" was the answer.

There could be no doubt now as to who they were, and the bandit king took his foot from the stirrup and returned his pistol to its belt.

The detective who had been shadowing the hut ever since the bandit and the lone traveler had come to it, was now forced to retire further and further into the deep forest, while the band reached the house.

"Boys, don't make too much noise," said Jesse, when the banditti had joined him.

"Why, what is up now, Jesse James?" asked the irrepressible Jim Cummins.

"I have the father of the young man, upstairs, and I think we can make the young feller tell where the money is, through the father."

"How?"

"Simple enough."

"Explain."

"Well, Art Corbett would hang before he would tell us where he had hidden the money."

"Yes."

"But he would perhaps not see his father hung before his eyes."

"That is an idea."

"It will work."

"I believe it will."

"When are you going to put it in force?"

"At once; or as soon as we can. Have you seen anything of Carl Greene, or any of the other band?"

"No."

Then they began the discussion of how soon they would start. "As to that matter," said Jesse, "the sooner we start the better. I am sure that we should have this fixed up at once,

because there is no telling what moment Carl Greene and his gang, with Timberlake, will be onto our trail."

They little dreamed that Carl Greene had been an eye-witness to the gathering, and was even then on his way to bring the sheriff and his deputies to attack the banditti.

"Let us get at it at once, then," said Cole Younger. "Perhaps you had better go up and awaken that old man, and tell him that we are a party of friends who have come to the forest for a hunt, and that we have agreed to help you and him in recovering the missing son."

"Yes, but he must awaken to the reality some time."

"Let him do that when he sees his son a prisoner. The longer he can travel with us peaceably, without any screeching or noise, the better it will be to our interests and to his."

"You are perfectly correct there," said Jesse, "and I will do it."

He turned abruptly about to enter the house, when he suddenly paused as if seized by a paroxysm.

He bent his ear a little to the ground and said:

"I hear horses' feet, boys. Look out for trouble now."

"So do I," said Jim Cummins.

The steady, regular tramp of horses' feet was now plainly heard by all.

The detective in the distant wood heard it and came closer to see who it was and what the result would be.

The bandits now gave their whole attention to this new danger.

Every man was on horseback or near his horse, crouching close to a tree with a deadly weapon in his hand, ready to make a fight to the death if they should be attacked, and all confidently expected an attack.

here," said Jesse, as a new thought entered his mind.

"If any of you stir for your lives until I come back."

He stepped from the saddle, and, with a cocked revolver in his hand, looked down the path up which the newcomers were coming.

"Just now would blast all our hopes," the bandit king said. "We don't have Timberlake or the detective here, we will try to get along without a fight."

He went about one

halted behind a large

of horsemen came in

"Halt!" he called, in a loud voice, yet loud enough to be heard by the advancing horsemen.

They came to a halt, and the click of rifles and pistols could be plainly heard.

"Who are you?" asked the bandit king.

"Waal, I reckon that is Jesse James' voice, ef I hain't missed my guess," said a voice which the bandit king recognized as the voice of Bill Dalton.

"You are Bill Dalton, are you not?"

"Wouldn't be surprised."

"Well, if you are Bill Dalton, I am Jesse James."

"Then we air both engaged in the same line."

"Very nearly the same," said the bandit king.

There was a moment's silence, and then Jesse said:

"Where are you going?"

"We air goin' to the house there jist ahead of you. It is our'n. We hev been makin' it our home, when we war in this part o' the country, for years."

"Well, it is time that you changed quarters, isn't it?"

"Now, Jesse, there ain't no need for us to quarrel and fight any more. Do you know that Carl Greene and Timberlake have a big posse in these woods?"

"Have they?"

"Yes."

"I propose that we hold a conference. Bring your two lieutenants here and I will bring mine. What do you say to that?"

"I agree to it," said Bill.

"Then wheel your men about, Bill, and take them three hundred yards down the road and bid them remain there until the conference is over and we have decided whether we will unite or not."

Bill Dalton held a consultation with some of his men for a single moment, and then said:

"We will do it."

"Come now, Bill Dalton, this must be a fair and square game. Don't you attempt to come any trick over us, for I tell you it won't pay," said the bandit king. "My men are all in line of battle and will fire on any body of men who attempt any flank movement or advance."

"That is right, Jesse; we will play honest, and my men will shoot any one who attempts to attack us."

"You are perfectly correct."

Bill Dalton then led his men back four hundred yards, and Jesse James went back for Jim Cummins and Cole Younger, his lieutenants.

They came to the spot just as Dalton and two of his men were seen coming toward them.

"Here they come," said Jesse James.

There lay a great cottonwood log at the side of the road and the three bandits sat down upon it.

In a few moments they were joined by the rival band of officers.

"How do you propose a compromise? On what basis will you compromise?"

"Give us one-half."

"Half of what?"

"Half ye git of the twenty-five thousand dollars. We are partners in that, but in nuthin' more."

Jesse was silent.

He did not know that, after all they had undergone, if he could possibly give half of the fortune which was in store for them to the rival band.

"What do ye say to it, Jess?"

"I am not prepared to agree to it yet."

"You hain't?"

"No. Do you?"

"I tell ye, I do. If ye say half and half, half and half it is, and you uns will be one hundred and fifty dollars better off, if we never find the twenty-five thousand. If we do find it we will divide it between the rival bands."

Jesse James took Cole Younger and Jim Cummins aside and asked:

"What do you think of the proposition?"

"I believe that we had better take it, Jesse," said Cole.

Jesse went back to where Dalton and his lieutenants sat and said:

"We have decided that we will accept your proposition."

"Then yer all hunk!" said Dalton, rising and grasping his hat.

"Now, the first thing you are to do is to turn over to us the half of the prize money you took."

"Oh, yes! Here, Ben, you are the treasurer; let me hev one hundred and fifty."

One of Dalton's men counted out the money.

He handed it over to the bandit king.

"Now that air all square and fair, boys."

"Yes."

"Whar are ye goin' ter start fust?"

"We will go to Lop-ear Creek, but we must not reach the Sugar Cleft until to-morrow night. We have the young man's father with us. We will make him think that we are hunters. That you are all friends of mine and that we are going to his son to rescue him. And we will, for he shall give up the money or we will hang them both, just as sure as the sun rises and sets!"

The bandit king was terribly in earnest.

They then repaired to the house for further discussion.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HIDING PLACE.

The bandits little dreamed that one of the keenest ears the world has ever known had been listening to all they said.

When they rose and went toward the house there rose from among the leaves, behind the very log on which they had sat during the conference, no less personage than Carl Greene, the detective.

The detective gazed after the retreating banditti, the last of whom were still in sight.

"So they are going to Lop-ear Creek?" he thought.

Then he listened and gazed all about him.

"They rendezvous at Sugar Cleft!"

Again he looked and listened.

"Well, there is no doubt but that the prisoner is somewhere in that Sugar Cleft. They have his father a prisoner, and are going to have father and son meet each other, and if the son don't tell where the money is concealed they will hang the father. Well, it will be a strong card to induce the son to tell, but I fancy we will be on hand about that time, and that there will be quite a little spell of fun before it is through with."

The detective then glided away into the forest.

Just at sunrise, in a secluded glen, a party of horsemen, who had been sleeping on their saddles and blankets, were rising, rubbing their eyes and getting fully awake.

Suddenly their commander—a large, powerful man, with long, dark whiskers—heard a whistle off on the western side of the creek.

"Some one is coming, boys!"

"It's the detective!"

"It may be. To arms!"

In a moment every man had seized his saddle and clapping it on a horse, had seized a gun and pistol, and in many cases both.

"It may be Carl Greene," said the James Boys, "but he be the James Boys or their rivals. Let us be prepared."

A few moments later, and the sheriff said:

"It is the detective."

In a few moments the detective was with the sheriff.

"Well, what did you make?"

"I have learned," the scout answered.

"What?"

"The rival bands consolidated their forces."

"Have they?"

"Yes; and expect one of the biggest fights soon we have enjoyed since."

"Well, we won't have to wait long."

"We?"

"What did you learn on your scout?" asked the sheriff.

"I learned that they have Mr. George Corbett, the father of A. with them."

"Where?"

"I don't think he knows it. He fell in with Jesse the way, and they made him believe they were hunters."

"And go with him to find his son."

"That was a shrewd trick, but what do they intend doing with him when they find him?"

"They will then throw off the mask and make themselves known to the father and son, and if the lad does not tell where the money is buried they will hang first his father before his eyes and then himself."

"Such a dastardly act cannot be permitted."

"Now we are on Lop-ear Creek, do you know where Sugar Cleft is?"

"Yes; one of the men who has been here pointed it out to me yesterday. It is a great hillock or mountain of stone that is split in twain."

Tom Lofton, the lieutenant of the deputies, was found, and instructions given to him in regard to how he should act in case of an attack.

Then Carl Greene, Timberlake and Jack Owensby, the man who knew all about Lop-ear Creek, set out for the Cleft.

It was four or five miles away, and the ground was so rough and broken that the three men did not reach the Cleft until it was nearly noon.

"That is it," said Jack, pointing to where a vast mound, part of it covered with scrubby trees and tufts of dark, dirty grass stood, and a part of it bare. The mound was split in twain, and one standing due west of it could see the bright sky in the cleft.

That part of it which was bare was of the color of brown sugar, which gave it the name of Sugar Cleft.

The three men at once began searching for some indication of a hiding place, but could find none.

They went upon the top and looked down in the cleft. A great deep chasm yawned there before them, but that was all.

The dark depths of that chasm seemed impenetrable, and they thought surely it would be impossible for any one to be in there.

Then they went around the sides twice, and at last, wearied, sat down in front of an old snag or stump of a tree that stood on the side of the mound.

"I think that we will have to give it up," said Timberlake. "If they have a hiding place here it is so snugly concealed that no one can find it."

"I know what we can do," said Carl Greene.

"What?"

"We can get our men ready and all wait here until they come up, and then we can let drive on them."

"Yes, we can do that?"

"I believe we will have to do it."

At this moment Carl Greene turned his eyes toward the hollow snag or stump that was not twenty paces away from him.

The snag was between him and the west, so that the reflection from the setting sun was full upon his face.

He gazed a moment in amazement, and at last exclaimed:

"Hello! Don't you see that?"

"What?"

"Look at that old snag."

"Yes."

"At the top."

"By Jove! there is smoke coming out of the top of it."

"Yes, that old snag is a stovepipe."

"It looks that way."

"Timberlake, what do you read by that sign?" asked the detective.

"I read that there is a kitchen beneath that stovepipe."

"You are correct."

The detective was now convinced that he had found the secret hiding place in which the prisoner was kept, but he was puzzled to know how in the world they were to find the entrance to it.

"Now, the entrance is not far away," he said. "These tumbled-up rocks and wild, tangled bushes, it seems to me, indicate that there could be a dozen hiding places. Let us look among the rocks."

Then commenced an earnest search among the rocks which were piled up in promiscuous confusion everywhere. Just as they were on the point of giving it up, Carl Greene, who had been tracing a very dim path, came to where it ended right where there were three large rocks that seemed huge cubes of stone hewn and put down there to form three sides of a wall.

The three corners of this wall left a space about two yards across.

There laid a stone on a level with the earth, which seemed to be another great cube of stone that was almost buried.

Carl Greene gazed at it for a few moments, while Jack and Timberlake stood some distance away in utter despair of ever finding the hiding place.

At last he turned about and motioned to them.

"What will you have, Carl?" asked Timberlake.

"Come here."

"What have you found?"

"A stone."

"A stone! That is no curiosity in this country; there are plenty of them."

"I know it. Now look here," he said, pointing to the stone he was gazing at. "Learn to think and to reason as you go along."

"What shall we reason from?"

"What is there to reason about?"

"If you will closely observe, there is a dim path that leads up to this stone."

"By Jove! it is so."

"That path is made by feet!"

"Yes."

"No animal would make it."

"There would be no cause for an animal to make it as it leads to no den, nor to any water or place of food."

"You are perfectly right, Tim, and so, we conclude at once that it was made by men. Now they did not go beyond the stone."

"No."

"They could not."

"No."

"Why did they come to it, Tim?"

"There, you have got me!"

"Tim, you and Jack and I will now stoop and take hold of the outer edge of this stone and lift with all our strength."

"Why, that is foolish. That is a square cube of stone and weighs a hundred ton for all we know."

"Do as I say, anyway."

"It is of no use."

"Do it just to please me."

"I believe that poor Carl is losing his senses," said Timberlake.

Nevertheless they all three stooped down and seized the outer edge of the stone, and by one tremendous effort lifted it from the ground.

It was only a thin slab of stone, and the three could up-end it with ease.

When they had raised it upon its side, Carl Greene pointed to an opening in the ground and a pair of natural steps in the stone descending to the earth.

"Boys, let it down easily," said Carl Greene.

His companions were too much amazed to make any remark, and the stone was laid down over the covering.

Timberlake took his red bandana handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his perspiring brow, as he said:

"Well, I'll be jiggered if ever I heard of the like in all my life."

"It is about the neatest hidin' place I ever saw!" declared Jack.

The detective was silent until he was appealed to.

"What do you think of such a natural hiding place, Carl Greene?" asked the sheriff.

"I don't think it strange and then it is probably not altogether natural."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I think that this place has been a bear or wolf den at some time, and that Jesse James or some of his band when closely pursued have found the hole and gone into it. As for the cap or covering of the hole, if you will look about you you will find half a dozen more slabs of stone that could be used for the same purpose."

"You are right," said the sheriff; "but the steps?"

"Oh, possibly it was nothing but a sloping ledge of rock leading down to the bowels of the earth, but the industrious bandits at their leisure hours have cut out the steps in the rock."

"It could be easily done," Jack declared.

"And the tree?"

"Well, that was a tree that grew in the shallow soil right over

the cavern. Perhaps the thin stone beneath it broke down and left the roots exposed so it died and left the hollow for the opening, but we have no more time to philosophize; we must get to business. I will stay here, and Jack will remain lower down the hill on guard, and do you, Tim, hasten back after the men. Bring them here and we will post them before the bandits come."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Jesse James little dreamed that there was a human being in the world outside of himself and the two guards who dreamed of the existence of the cave in the mountains.

They neared the Sugar Cleft about midnight.

Jim Cummins, with four men, had been sent forward to reconnoitre, and came back.

"What report, Jim?" asked Jesse.

"The way is clear," Jim answered.

"Then we will go."

They advanced until they were almost at the cleft, when the bandit king ordered the men to dismount and the horses were left with a guard, and with the other they crept up to the entrance to the cavern.

"I wonder what has become of Carl Greene and Timberlake?" the bandit king whispered to Cole Younger. "I expected that we would have met them before this time."

"So did I."

"The way seems clear."

The cave was reached and the great stone raised.

Mr. Corbett was filled with wonder and amazement.

"How did you know of that?" he asked. "Is my son in there?"

He still thought himself among friends.

"I think he is," Jesse answered.

He became very non-communicative with the old man, and had notified two of his men to stand near and guard him.

Two men were sent down to bring out the guard and prisoner, and in a few moments Arthur was brought up, pale and weak, but unconquered.

"My son, my son, rescued at last!" cried the father, bounding forward to his son.

Starting back in amazement, the young man cried:

"What! Father, are you here?"

"Yes, I came to rescue you."

A roar of laughter on the part of the bandits was the answer.

"Father, you have been deceived. They have ruined you. These are the James Boys, and the rival band."

"Oh, no, son, you are surely mistaken. They are not. They are the friends whom I met, and who said they would rescue you."

"And we have done done it," said Jesse James.

Again there was a roar of laughter on the part of the banditti, and the old man began to see through it all.

"Father, you are ruined as well as I!"

At this moment Mr. George Corbett was seized by two of the guard.

"I see it all now," he said. "I have been a blind fool to be led into such a trap as this."

"Now, Arthur Corbett," said the bandit king, "you shall tell us where the money is concealed, or you shall have the exquisite pleasure of witnessing the hanging of your own father."

"Oh, don't! don't! don't!" gasped the agonized youth.

"Hold up, Arthur, be a man!" cried the brave father, who at once saw through their whole plan. "If you had concealed the money before they captured you, die a thousand times and see me die ten thousand times before you ever tell him where it is!"

"I will!" cried the youth.

"What?"

"Do your worst; I will not tell."

"We'll make short work of you, and you shall see your own father hung."

"They'd do it anyway, Art."

"I know it."

"Look here, you two," said Jesse James, "I mean business. We must get out of this country, and get out at once, I would have you to know. Now what do you say? Shall you both hang?"

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

Almost in concert the two answered yes.

"Then, boys, bring them down to this tree. We will leave them both swinging to one limb," said Jesse James.

They hastened them down the hill among the rocks and breaks.

"Halt!"

"Surrender!"

"Down with them!"

Whence came those wild cries from the rocks?

Wild shouts right of the banditti, wild yells left of them, and all about them rose such a tremendous cry that they were for a moment appalled.

Jesse James did not for a single moment lose his presence of mind.

He comprehended all in a moment, and yelled:

"A surprise! A surprise!"

Crack!

Crack!

Bang!

Bang!

The flash of guns and pistols were all about them and the loud roar of firearms seemed to make the very air tremble.

Men fell wounded and crying among the rocks and others dashed forward with tremendous yells, and the conflict grew hotter every moment.

At last there was no doubt how the fight would go.

The fierce banditti surprised by a superior force would be bound to retreat.

"Kill the prisoners!" the bandit king yelled.

With whoop and shout they sprang to where the two prisoners stood by the side of a rock.

"Forward! defend prisoners!" cried the detective, and he and Timberlake like two monsters of war, suddenly leaped forward and hurled themselves upon the enemy, and stood right before the two prisoners.

They fired shot after shot at the outlaws, until they had driven them back several paces, and then the detective cried:

"Now leap behind those rocks. We will protect you."

Others came to the aid of the detective and sheriff, and formed a line in front of the prisoners.

Jesse James saw what they intended doing, and he called to his men to dash forward and kill the prisoners.

"Don't let 'em escape!" roared Jesse.

"Kill the prisoners!" yelled Dalton.

Then the combined forces of Dalton and Jesse James made a dash at the line of men forming for the protection of the prisoners. The battle raged about them more furiously than it had before, for the bandits seemed determined to have the lives of the Corbetts.

"Break through their lines!" cried the bandit king. "Kill 'em!"

"Where are they?" asked Dalton.

The father and son had leaped behind rocks, and were out of pistol range.

"They are just over the rocks," said Jim Cummins.

"Let us get over there and go after them," said another of the bandits.

"Over with you!" roared Jesse James. "Down with these rascals in front!"

Bang!

Crack!

The detective and Jesse James exchanged shots at such close range that their bullets almost whizzed at the same moment.

At the moment Jesse James fired, one of the deputies struck at him with his rifle barrel and the bullet glanced from the steel barrel.

The next moment when Carl Greene fired, one of the bandits had thrown his arm forward and the ball struck it, so the prince of detectives and king of outlaws were both saved.

Yet the fight went on.

It waxed hotter and hotter every moment, and the confusion and uproar among the rocks on the side of the mound was so great that all the wild animals for miles around took fright and fled from the scene.

The detective and his party stood stubbornly on their ground and defended themselves and the men they had rescued from the terrible banditti, which hurled themselves, again and again, like an avalanche, upon them, trying with all their might and main to break through their ranks.

They were driven back at last, and Carl Greene gave the loud command to charge.

In a moment the deputies, with yells of vengeance, rushed upon the banditti.

The impetuosity of this attack they could not for long withstand, and they broke and fled at the top of their speed down the hill and among the rocks to where their horses were.

In vain Jesse James, Cole Younger and Bill Dalton sought to rally them.

In vain they appealed to their manhood and their courage, and told them that they would yet win if they only turned and fought. They were broken down and discouraged, and fled to their horses.

"Wait until we are once mounted, and then we shall make a stand," said the bandit king. "We don't fight well on foot, but let the James Boys once get in the saddle and they are supreme."

But Jesse was doomed to disappointment.

They had been so completely whipped and crushed that when they reached their horses they mounted and fled for life instead of turning about and attacking the enemy, and all that the bandit king could do was to join them.

The banditti were scattered far and wide, and it was a long time before they again assembled in the wood known as the Black Forest.

Several of Dalton's men were wounded and captured.

These, with two of the James Boys' men, were sent to the penitentiary.

The James Boys, after several weeks, gathered up the remnants of their shattered band and organized them again into something like order, and for many years were the dread of all law-abiding citizens.

Carl Greene, as soon as the banditti had been put to rout, went to the Corbetts, father and son, and found them unharmed.

"Have you told any one where the money was hidden?" he asked.

"No."

"Can you go to it?"

"Yes."

"Lead us to it at once."

The young man led them to the spot where he had buried the money, and they found it safe and sound.

The joy of the father knew no bounds, but it was hardly equaled by the joy of the mother when she found her son restored to her once more.

She became so happy that she almost went insane. Carl Greene and his associates were liberally rewarded for what they had done.

The Black Forest has disappeared, and to-day farms and villages smile where once a dark wilderness frowned, but the old settlers have not forgotten when it was the haunt of the James Boys and the rival band, from whom Carl Greene delivered the banker's son.

THE END.

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